

Durito's Return



Returning from Mexico City, Durito tries to tell a story about how the magician Merlin appeared to him, but Marcos protests that he already knows the story from *Don Quijote*. Durito and Marcos, along with Camilo and Marcos' "Other Self," form a study group on politics and culture beginning with a session on criticism and self-criticism. This communiqué follows the EZLN's call for a *consulta*, a national and international plebiscite on Zapatista politics and coincides with the meeting of the National Citizens' Consultation (June 30- July 1), in which over 800 non-governmental organizations proposed a national dialogue regarding economic, political and social reforms of the state.

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Sirs:

Here are a communiqué and letters to their respective addressees. June left us after pretending it was turning May when it was turning July. In fact, according to the “efficient” PGR, this June would be my birthday, and according to the complicated computers of the PGR, I would turn 38 years old.¹ I solemnly declare that I have not received (yet) a single gold coin of the 38 to which I am entitled. Camilo laughs and says “What-38-you’re-more-like-83.” Well then, it should be 83 gold coins or their equivalent in UDI.²

Vale. Salud, and I say what is needed to solve that puzzle is . . . shame.

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast
Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos

P.S. that tells of Durito’s return and of other unhappy (for me) events.

“No, no and no,” I answer Durito who has started a story with an account of how Merlin appeared to him with a skull’s face and a bony body, to reveal the secret of the enchantment of Dulcinea de la Lacandona.³

“Why do you say ‘no’ if you still don’t know what I’m going to ask you?” says Durito.

“Because I already know that story from Part 2 of the *Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quijote de La Mancha*, where Merlin tells Sancho Panza that he should give himself 3,600 lashes on his buttocks.”⁴

And then I remember not Sancho’s donkey nor the winged “Clavileño [little peg] the Fleet” (which is a suitable name because it’s made of wood, it has a peg in its forehead, and it goes fast, so as far as names go it can certainly compare with your famous “Rocinante,” upon which the noble knight defeated the giant and bewitching Malabrundo), but rather the mounts he must have suffered with on previous paths: *El Salvaje*, who was as his name indicates inclined to take off into

1 In February 1995, the PGR claimed to have identified Marcos as Rafael Sebastián Vicente Guillén, as a pretext for their military offensive.

2 UDI or *unidad de inversión* is an accounting unit fixed daily in Mexico and designed to index loans against inflation. “*Udis*” reflect the changes in the price level against loan principal.

3 Dulcinea del Toboso was the noble name bestowed by Don Quijote on the peasant girl Aldonza Lorenzo converting her into a princess and lady for whom he could perform heroic deeds.

4 Actually, Merlin calls for 3,300 lashes. See Cervantes, *Don Quijote* (Chapter 33, p. 549)

dense woods when he wanted to be free of his rider, or who would throw himself on the ground and escape saddle and burden whenever both annoyed him.⁵

El Puma, famished horse, as skinny as a hat-rack who barely served to keep others company and who, so they tell, died of melancholy in a pasture. *El Choco*, who, if seniority were worth military rank, would be a commander. Old and noble horse that with a blind right eye managed with his left to clear steep banks and quagmires, which were so abundant on the roads back then. *El Viajero*, a high-stepping and spirited burro. *El Tractor*, a brilliant black stallion with an elegant and obliging step, a gentleman on the hills of sloping smooth stones and slippery and broken promises.

P.S. that tells how criticism and self-criticism. . . take shape?

A lazy cloud reclines among the trees and the moon pierces it with thousands of white pins. A fire beetle that forgot that it's already June, serpentine dubiously between the campfire and the red-gray of the cigarettes. An ordinary dawn, an ordinary mountain, some ordinary men and . . . a beetle?

"You have a beetle on your shoulder," Camilo tells me. I'm not surprised and respond,

"And you have a tick on your neck, and My Other Self, a spider on the ear, and I don't say anything. Besides, it's not a beetle; it's a little parrot that speaks in French . . ." Durito looks at me, surprised, but he is not intimidated and consequently begins to recite:

Ma pauvre muse, hélas! Qu'as-tu donc ce matin!
Tes yeux creux son peuplés de visions nocturnes,
Et je vois tour à tour réfléchies sur ton teint
La folie et l'horreur, froides et taciturnes.⁶

And then he adds, forcibly:

We are not ten, nor are we a hundred,
we are about three,
count us well!

5 See Cervantes, *Don Quijote*, p. 568. Don Quijote called his horse Rocinante because the name "struck him as a truly lofty name, resonant, and also meaningful, because an old horse [rocin] was exactly what it had been, before [ante], while now it had risen to be first and foremost among all the old horses in the world" (p. 15). Malabrundo, a giant and evil magician, appears in Volume II, chapters 39-41.

6 From the poem "*La Muse Malade*" (The Sick Muse) in Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal* (The Flowers of Evil) (1855) (Paris: Editions Gamier Freres, 1959), 16-17. This first stanza of a poem that juxtaposes the insanity and horror of modernity to healthier and lustier antiquity reads, "My poor muse, alas! what's wrong with you this morning? / Your empty eyes are full of nocturnal visions / And I see reflected in your countenance, one after another, / madness and horror, cold and taciturn."

The “cell” of three is meeting and Durito has decided to contribute his nonsense about life imitating art and so he joins in the session.

“Weren’t there four three musketeers?” Durito asks me when I object to his attending the meeting of the cell. I agreed and Durito takes the affirmation as approval and here we are . . . The three of us who are four.

The first point on the agenda is to name our cell of political study and cultural activities. In honor of Ettore Scola we call ourselves the “dirty, ugly and bad.”⁷ But there were protests. Camilo said that we might be dirty and ugly, but that part about being bad was a simplistic and Manichaeian vision. Camilo proposed changing “bad” for “rude” and it came out the “dirty, ugly, bad, and rude.” Criticism and self-criticism usually provoke a profound silence that reveals complexity.

But today there are a lot of mosquitoes, a sign of rain, and no one wants to leave the fire or the smoke, so My Other Self begins a session that promises to be like a dialogue between the ee-zee-el-en and the supreme government: “I criticize myself for gathering firewood when it was El Sup’s turn and in this way I have encouraged his laziness and his playing the fool with his stories about beetles and knight-errantry.” I remain calm and respond with a conciliatory: “I criticize myself for always picking up after My Other Self and thus promoting his carelessness, laziness, and screwing-up.” Camilo doesn’t criticize or self-criticize; he only enjoys hearing how My Other Self and yours truly exchange criticisms disguised as self-criticisms. We would have spent all night like that if it had not begun to rain. The wood gets wet, the fire goes out . . .

The appointment of a secretary of the cell remained pending because Durito, that is, the parrot, argued that the electoral registry had to be purged.

P.S. that declares, I acknowledge receipt of a notebook (that they say was sent back in April) with a reproduction on the cover of Pablo Picasso’s oil painting entitled *Consulta* on the cover.

On the first page it reads, “For sonnets and other things. Take good care of yourself.” I christened the notebook with the following: “If I knew how to write sonnets I would not have taken up arms, and if I took good care of myself I would not be here. Signed, El Sup.” And I went on to use the notebook for “other things.”

Vale once again. *Salud*, and if our eyes shine, what does it matter if night suffocates us?

7 The film *Brutti sporchi e cattivi* (1976) also known as *Ugly, Dirty and Bad* or *Down and Dirty*, written and directed by Ettore Scola, portrays a family struggling in a Roman shantytown while each dreams of ways to eliminate the others.

El Sup blowing out the little candles on the cake, just to show he still can . . .
(Durito says that blowing out candles with sneezes doesn't count. I told him that
making mud pies just to thicken the pee-gee-ar's soup doesn't count).

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