

Love and the Calendar



Writing from the top of the ceiba, Marcos finds a bottle containing a letter from Durito. The letter includes a story composed for the latter's forthcoming book, *Stories for a Sleepless Solitude*, which tells how a man who was always late missed his own death. Durito's letter ends with a postscript warning that "fierce storms are coming." The previous June, the Popular Revolutionary Army, or EPR (*Ejercito Popular Revolucionario*), had emerged in Guerrero and carried out attacks in seven Mexican states just prior to the September 1st Presidential State of the Nation Address. On September 2nd, the EZLN suspended peace talks acting "on orders from their base communities," who doubted the government's sincerity in the negotiations and demanded respect for Zapatista delegates. In the coming weeks, they reported increased harassment of the communities, and military advances towards the EZLN's mountain camps.

First published in *La Jornada*, September 20, 1996. Originally translated by Susana Saravia.

Morning voyage aboard comunicués
To the National and International Press
September 18, 1996

Ladies and Gentleman:

I am still on top of the ceiba. I made a paper airplane out of the comunicués and I launched it with great force. Almost immediately it started to rain. “You should have made a paper boat!” My Other Self yelled at me from a schooner. In the distance, daybreak amicably ceded its place to a lazy dawn.

Vale. Salud, and who can predict tomorrow’s flower from today’s bare ground?

From the mountains of Numancia¹
Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos

The Recurrent Postscript:
The ceiba is the mast of unstable sailing.

I was at the highest point of the mast (yes, I know it’s a ceiba branch, but the two look alike), checking the horizon, when there in the distance was a fleeting spout, alight in the lightning that gave it life. The night was a dark storm and, yet, the moon could just barely be seen charging towards the east. A reflection reached the sea so that a small bank of white sand could be seen. It’s true that the sea at night holds surprises, but to spot a white sandbank is extremely rare. What I mean is that it’s not unusual to spot data banks, financial banks or even blood banks, but never a white sandbank.² I reached for the telescope and aimed for X ship’s bow, where the moon had illuminated the beach, but there was nothing, only the black yawn of a nocturnal rain. A lightning bolt again made visible that foamy spout but now on the port side. I turned in that direction and was able to distinguish a large white mass. Wait a minute! Now the watery spout is again portside! Is this a pirate ship or a merry-go-round? Hmmm . . . everything indi-

1 The citizens of Numancia, an ancient city in what is now Northern Spain, committed mass suicide rather than be overrun by the Romans in 134 B.C. In a comunicués dated September 7, 1996, Marcos quotes Miguel Cervante’s *The Encirclement of Numancia*: “The right of the strongest is the violation of the essence of the right. The power (Rome) is the enemy of morality and of liberty (Numancia). Numancia speaks to the condemned of the Earth not to drive them to suicide, but to resistance and the final victory.” See *La Jornada* 1995/24 de enero de 1997 (México, D. F.: Ediciones Era, 1997), 377-79.

2 Marcos revives a metaphor used in “The Long Journey from Despair to Hope,” which speaks of “neoliberal chants of 24 mermaids, of reefs of gold, of grounding on sand banks of depression and of other dangers that threaten the pirates on high seas,” originally published in the Anniversary Supplement of *La Jornada* (September 22, 1994).

cates that the sandbank moves. Hmmm . . . I aim my one eye on the telescope and, focusing, say to myself that, if it's not a white sandbank that's moving, then, it could very well be a whale. Yes, a white whale like Moby Dick! Yes, it is he! Who else would present himself with such impunity—Córdoba Montoya?³ No, it's not one of those pirates we talk about. Yes, it's Moby Dick. And here I am, all alone. That last sailor was drowned by a hurricane. Well, actually, it was a woman, but in this case it's the same thing. I chased Moby Dick away with that saying by Pavese that goes:

There is no voice that breaks the silence of the water
under the dawn.
And nothing that makes it shiver
under the heavens. Only a tepidity that dilutes the stars.⁴

The ceiba tree is a coin-toss.

I was on top of the ceiba tree, thinking about how to get down in a way that my pride and my backside would both come out unscathed, when My Other Self arrived and, without much ado, blurted out, "Everyone's saying . . . they're saying that the supreme one says that the coin has been tossed, and that it came up tails—and that now they're going to beat yours because your 'Ha!' hurt him more than the '*Ya basta!*' of 94."⁵ I didn't even flinch, I just started trying to figure out where in the ceiba tree there was room for a tomb. It was no use. "I have to get down," I tell My Other Self. He looks at me with irony and asks, "Are you afraid?" "Never ever," I respond, "but over there" (I point to the horizon) "it looks like better times are coming. If I stay up here I'll miss the best part . . ."

3 Córdoba Montoya, Former Chief of Staff to Carlos Salinas, wielded an exceptional amount of power for the office. Suspected of involvement in the Colosio assassination, narcotics trafficking and other crimes associated with the administration, he was questioned by the Mexican Congress the day this communiqué appeared in *La Jornada*.

4 Cesare Pavese, the Italian poet and author, also translated English and American literature including the work of Melville. In 1935, on charges of "anti-fascist activities," he was confined for three years in the isolated village of Brancaleone. There he completed his best-known work, *Lavorare Stanca*, a moving critique of fascist Italy first published in 1936. See *Hard Labor*, William Arrowsmith, trans. (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1976). The quoted text is from the poem *Creazione* (1935).

5 This "Ha!" appears to be a reference to Marcos' letter to President Zedillo published in *La Jornada* on September 3, 1995. Responding to the illegitimacy of the "*Segundo Informe de Gobierno*" ("Second Government Report") on the peace talks, Marcos states that the Zapatistas hopelessly await indications of the government's will to bring about peace, claiming that they "seem to have created a climate of terror" and "seem to think they have enough public opinion on their side that they can now attack the Zapatistas." "If that is the case," he concludes, "then we'll see you in hell!"

A ceiba tree is an island aspiring to fly.

A bottle arrived floating on the crest of a cloud and got stuck in one of the branches of the ceiba. I carefully moved closer—a fall from this height would be as hard as when the system crashed in 1988—and grabbed it.⁶ As one would suppose, the bottle had a message inside. I took it out and found the following letter from Durito:

My dearest Cyrano in decadence:

I have learned that once again you find yourself prisoner on top of the ceiba tree. This happens when you get carried away with your nonsense about mirrors and falling upwards. At the moment, it is impossible for me to come rescue you. I am veery busy with the writing of the second volume of *Stories for a Suffocating Night*. As of now, they will be titled *Stories for a Sleepless Solitude*. Herein I send you a sample so that you can retain an editor.

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There was once a man who was always late for everything. And it was not because he was lazy or slow, or that his watch was behind, or that it was a bad habit. It was because this man was living in another time, before time. Not much, really, but always a little. For example, when the calendar marked the month of September, this man was walking in an April morning. For that reason, his spring never coincided with its opposite. Death, however, continued to be obedient to the passing of time and went about delivering absences as the allotment of people's days and nights would run out. But since this man was never on time, well, he always arrived late to the hour of his death and could never meet up with her, because Death had to follow the calendar. Death knew that she was leaving that one pending—that this man should already be dead and yet, owing to his tardiness, was still alive. The man got tired of living and walking, which in this case is the same, and set out to look for Death so that he could die. And so time and untimeliness pass each other, Death, hoping for the man to arrive so that she can take him, and the man, hoping to meet Death so that he can die. There is no day on the calendar for those two wishes to meet. *Tan-tan*.

What do you think? No, leave your praises for later. Well, I give you my leave. I will write you later, my decadent and large-nosed squire.

Don Durito de la Lacandona

6 The 1988 Presidential elections were marked by widespread fraud in a multitude of forms. Most notably, the federal electoral commission reported a computer “system crash” while votes were being tallied. The system remained down for a week, during which time it appeared that opposition votes were destroyed. Although PRI candidate Carlos Salinas was pronounced the winner, PRD candidate Cuauhtémoc Cardenas is believed to have won 39% of the popular vote to Salinas' 37%. Ten days after the official results were announced, more than a half-million people protested the election fraud in Mexico City's Zócalo.

P.S. Don't forget to hold the rudder firm; they say fierce storms are coming.

End of the letter from Durito. No comment.

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