

# The Hour of the Little Ones, Part I: The Return of ...



More than three years since he set out to visit Mexico City, Don Durito, now a pirate, returns to visit Marcos after a long voyage to Europe. In the fall of 1999, amidst increasingly violent repression against Zapatistas in Chiapas and against students in Mexico City on strike against neoliberal policies at UNAM, Marcos releases this five-part communiqué. These letters form part of a series known as “Siete Veces Dos” (Seven Times Two), emphasizing solidarity with other national and international struggles, and dealing particularly with various struggles of the little ones: flood and earthquake victims, Latinos in the United States, homosexuals and students.

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First published in *La Jornada*, October 18, 1999. Originally translated by irlandesa.

October 12, 1999

For Don Emilio Krieger, who was always with the little ones.<sup>1</sup>

For the children of “El Molino” (of the Francisco Villa Popular Front) who lost their homes in a fire.<sup>2</sup>

In the letter box of time there are joys  
that no one shall call for / that no one will ever  
claim / and they will end up faded,  
yearning for the taste of the elements  
and nonetheless / from time’s letter box  
loose epistles will suddenly depart,  
ready to settle into some dream  
where chance fears are waiting.

—Mario Benedetti<sup>3</sup>

It’s just barely raining, a humid and cold breeze. However, the beating of the rain against the mountain over the last few days has been so much and so strong that it has left her more than a little dented, and there are scars that have entirely ruined her skirt. But, well, after such a storm, this drizzle is welcome. It is the time of the rains. The time of the little ones.

A good man has died. What can one say when a good man has died? Some children, who fearlessly opened their homes to receive one thousand one hundred and eleven faceless ones, have lost their homes. What can one say when a child loses her home? One says nothing; one is only silent. Because many times sorrows are for keeping silent. Nonetheless, attempting some relief, the little ones from this side of the blockade extend their bridges, like hands, to where the good man is missing, and to where doors and windows are missing, to open up to the other forgotten and little one, the dignified and rebel other. They build their bridges to walk with others, to be close, to not forget. Perhaps that is why, unhurriedly, the shadow tenderly hones the first two letters of this fourth epistle, seeking to coax a smile amidst so much pain that is suffered there.

Down there, the candle reiterates its vocation as a beacon for that sailor in the mountain who, lost, navigates the shadows of dawn. Yes, let’s go, but be care-

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1 Emilio Krieger Vásquez, a nationally known constitutional lawyer responsible for many legal actions in defense of the poor and of human rights, died September 19, 1999. He founded the National Association of Democratic Lawyers or ANAD (Asociación de Abogados Democráticos), and was one-time president of the Federal Electoral Institute, or IFE (Instituto Federal Electoral). His public writings in defense of human rights and against the Salinas administration led to attacks on him and his wife in April 1994. He was invited to the Zapatista “Dialogue with Civil Society” in October 1998.

2 On September 22, 1999, a fire destroyed more than 800 homes in the community of El Molino in Mexico City.

3 See Mario Benedetti, *Buzón del tiempo* (Alfaguara, Madrid: 1999). See also Angélica Abelleira’s interview with Benedetti about the Zapatistas in *La Jornada* (May 12, 1997).

ful with the mud and those puddles. You're going slowly? Well then, I'll go ahead and from there I'll show you the way. Good, here I am. Yes. The shadow is alone once more. No . . . Just a minute . . . There seems to be someone else. That candle won't stop flickering! No, I'm not able to see who else is there, but it's obvious that there's someone, because the shadow is speaking to him. No, it must be refusing him, because it does nothing but repeat "no, no and no." Wait, I'll go over to that corner to see better. There, that's it. Hmmm. I believe our favorite shadow has gone crazy. No one can be seen around here. And it, with its 'no, no and no.' In short, it was to be expected, so much rain and so much early rising would drive anyone crazy. What? But I already told you no one was there! I should move closer? And if he sees me? All right then, slowly and discreetly. No, I tell you, there's no one. Just a minute! Wait! Yes, I can make something out now . . . There, in a corner! Yes! What a relief! It hasn't gone crazy, no. What happened is that it was so small I didn't notice it . . . What? Who is it speaking with? Well, then . . . you'll see. Do you really want to know? Yes? Well . . . well, with a beetle!

## **Durito!**

### **Letter 4a**

"No, no and no!" I tell Durito for the umpteenth time.

Yes, Durito has returned. But before explaining my repeated "no," I should tell you all the whole story.

Early the other morning, when the rain formed a stream right in the middle of the hut, Durito arrived onboard a can of sardines that had a pencil stuck in the middle, and, on it, a handkerchief or something like that, which I would later find out was a sail.<sup>4</sup> On the highest part of the mainmast, excuse me, of the pencil, a black flag was flying, with a fierce skull resting on a pair of crossbones. It wasn't exactly a pirate ship but, well, at least a pirate sardine can. The thing is that the ship, or the can, landed right at the edge of the table, and it did so with such a din that Durito came flying out and landed right on my boot. Durito composed himself as best he could and exclaimed,

"Today . . . today . . ." he turns around to look at me and says, "Hey, you, carrot nose! Tell me the date promptly!"

I hesitate, a bit for wanting to embrace Durito since he'd returned, another little bit for wanting to kick him for the "carrot nose" thing, and another bit more for . . . for . . . the date? . . .

"Yes! The date. That is, day, month, current year. Wake up, fool, for it seems that you're in the presidential debates! Give me the date!"

I look at my watch and say, "October 12, 1999."

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<sup>4</sup> Durito's plan to sail to Europe in a sardine can was first mentioned in January 1996 in "Durito to Conquer Europe."

“October 12? By my faith, nature imitates art! Good. Today, October 12, 1999, I declare discovered, conquered and liberated this beautiful Caribbean island that answers to the name of . . . of . . . quick, the name of the island!”<sup>5</sup>

“What island?” I ask, still disconcerted.

“What do you mean, what island, fool? Well, this one! What other one would it be? There is no pirate worth his salt without an island for hiding treasure and pain . . .”

“Island? I always thought it was a tree, a ceiba to be more precise,” I say, leaning over the edge of the dense canopy.

“Well, you’re deceived, it’s an island. Where have you heard of a pirate landing on a ceiba? So, either tell me the name of this island, or your fate will be to serve as lunch for the sharks,” Durito says threateningly.

“Sharks?” I say, with a gulp. And I argue, stammering, “It has no name . . .”

“‘It Has No Name,’ Hmmm. By my faith, that is a right dignified name for a pirate’s island. Good, today, October 12, 1999, I declare the island of ‘It Has No Name’ to be discovered, conquered and liberated, and I name this individual of obvious nose my boatswain, first mate, cabin boy and lookout.”

I try to ignore the insult, as well as the multitude of conferred posts, and I say, “So . . . now you’re a pirate!”

“‘A pirate?’ Hell no! I am THE PIRATE!”

Just now I notice Durito’s appearance. A black patch adorns his right eye, a red scarf covers his head, on one of his multiple arms a twisted little wire acts as a hook, and in another shines the little stick that once was Excalibur. Now, I’m not sure, but it must be some kind of sword, saber, or whatever pirates use. Besides that, tied to one of his several little feet he has a little branch as if it were . . . as if it were . . . hmmm . . . a wooden leg!

“And, so, what do you think?” Durito says as he makes a half turn so that all the elegance he has fabricated for his pirate’s suit can be appreciated.

I ask him with care, “And so now you’re called?”

“‘Black Shield!’” Durito says pompously, and adds: “But you can put ‘Escudo Negro’ for those who aren’t globalized.”

“‘Black Shield’? But . . .”

“Certainly! Was there not a ‘Redbeard’ and a ‘Blackbeard’?”<sup>6</sup>

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5 October 12th is officially celebrated as “Columbus Day” but is also known as *Día de la Raza*, or Indigenous Peoples’ Day. On that day in 1992, protestors pulled down the public statute of the Conquistador Diego de Mazariegos in San Cristóbal de las Casas. This protest marked the first public appearance of the Zapatistas. See Neil Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Dignity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

6 “Redbeard” or Khayr ad-Din Barbarossa (c.1483–1546) from Lesbos was the most famous of the Barbary Coast pirates of the 1500s. He fought Spanish and Portuguese incursions into North Africa, at first independently and then for the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. “Blackbeard” or Edward Teach (c. 1680–1718) from Bristol, England operated out of North Carolina, in league with the Governor of that state, between 1716 and 1718.

“Well, yes, but . . .”

“Make no ‘buts’ about it! I am ‘Black Shield’! Compared with me, ‘Blackbeard’ is barely gray, and ‘Redbeard’ is more faded than your bandana!”

Durito has said this brandishing sword and hook at the same time. Standing now, on the bow of his can of sardi . . . excuse me, of his vessel, he begins reciting the “Pirate’s Song” . . .

“‘With ten cannons on each side’ . . .”

“Durito,” I try to call him to his senses.

“‘Wind at the stern, full sail’ . . .”

“Durito . . .”

“‘It does not cross the sea but flies’ . . .”

“Durito!”

“What? A royal galleon is within our reach? Quickly! Unfurl the sails! Prepare to board!”<sup>7</sup>

“Durito!” I shout, desperate now.

“Calm down, don’t shout or you’ll look like an unemployed buccaneer. What’s the matter with you?”

“Could you tell me where you’ve been, where you came from, and what brings you to these lands, excuse me, these islands?” I ask, more calmly now.

“I have been in Italy, England, Denmark, Germany, France, Greece, Holland, Belgium, Sweden, the Iberian Peninsula, the Canary Islands, in all of Europe.” Durito has said all this delivering gestures to the right and to the left.

“In Venice, I ate with Dario one of those pastas that the Italians love so much, and that leave me i-m-m-o-b-i-l-e.”

“Just a minute! Which Dario? You don’t mean that you were eating with Dario . . .”

“Yes, Dario Fo.<sup>8</sup> Well, eating, eating, no. He was eating; I was watching him eat. Because, look, that spaghetti gives me a stomach ache, and even more so when they put ‘*pesto*’ on it.”

“‘Pesto,’” I correct him.

“‘*Pasto*’ or ‘Pesto,’ it still tastes like grass.<sup>9</sup> As I was telling you, I arrived in Venice from Rome after escaping from one of those “Temporary Detention Centers (for Immigrants),” that are a kind of concentration camp where Italian officials isolate—before expelling from the country—everyone that comes from other countries, and who are, therefore, ‘different others.’ Leaving wasn’t easy—I had to start a riot. Clearly the support from those men and women in Italy who are against institutionalized racism was fundamental.<sup>10</sup> The fact is that Dario

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7 These are the opening lines of the poem “The Pirate’s Song” by José de Espronceda, a popular romantic poet of 19th-century Spain. See *Hispanic Anthology: Poems Translated from the Spanish by English and North American Poets*, Thomas Walsh, ed. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1920).

8 Dario Fo, an Italian playwright and actor famous for his political farces, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1997.

9 In Spanish *pasto* literally means “grass.”

wanted me to help him with some ideas for a theatrical work, and I didn't have the heart to say no."

"Durito . . ."

"Afterwards I went on the march against the UN for the war in Kosovo."

"That should be 'against NATO' . . ."

"It's the same. The thing is that, after a series of misadventures, I set off to the Island of Lanzarote."

"Just a minute! The island of Lanzarote? Isn't that where José Saramago lives?"<sup>11</sup>

"Yes, well, I call him 'Pepe.' What happened is that Pepe invited me for coffee so that I could tell him about my experiences in the Europe of the Euro. It was magnificent . . ."

"Yes, I imagine that it would have been magnificent to chat with Saramago . . ."

"No, I'm referring to the coffee that Pilarica prepared for us. She really does make a magnificent cup of coffee."

"You're referring to Pilar del Río?"<sup>12</sup>

"The same."

"So, one day you're eating with Dario Fo, and the next you're having coffee with José Saramago."

"Yes, those days I was rubbing elbows with nothing but Nobel Prize winners. But I was telling you that I had a fierce argument with Pepe."

"And the reason?"

"Well, the prologue he wrote for my book. It seemed to me in bad taste that he would reduce me, the great and even-tempered *Don Durito de La Lacandona*, to the world of Coleopterous Lamellicorn."<sup>13</sup>

"And how did the argument end?"

"Fine, I challenged him to a duel, just as the laws of knight-errantry demand."

"And? . . ."

"And nothing, I saw that Pilarica's heart was breaking, since it was obvious that I would win, and I forgave him . . ."

"You forgave José Saramago?"

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10 The free passage of European citizens, part of the consolidation of the European Union, also mandated harsher treatment of non-European immigrants, resulting in protests both from the detainees and pro-immigrant, anti-racist activists.

11 José Saramago is a left-wing Portuguese writer who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1998. Saramago has frequently traveled to Mexico and spoken out against government repression in Chiapas.

12 Pilar del Río, a Spanish writer and journalist, has written on the politics of Andalusian autonomy.

13 Durito is referring to José Saramago's prologue to the book by Subcomandante Marcos, *Don Durito de la Lacandona* (San Cristóbal de Las Casas: Centro de Información y Análisis de Chiapas, A.C., 1999).

“Well, not completely. For me to forget the affront, he shall have to come to these lands and declare, at the top of his voice, the following speech: “Hear ye. Tyrants, tremble. Damsels, sigh. Children, rejoice. The sad and needy, be glad. Hear ye. Once more across these lands walks the ever grand, the magnificent, the incomparable, the well-loved, the long-awaited, the onomatopoetic, the greatest of knights-errant, Don Durito de la Lacandona.”

“You would force José Saramago to come to Mexico to say those . . . those . . . those things?”

“Yes, it seemed like a light punishment to me as well. But after all, he is a Nobel Prize winner, and I might need someone to do the prologue for my next book.”

“Durito!” I chide him, and add, “Fine, but how was it that you turned into a pirate, excuse me, into THE PIRATE?”

“It was Sabina’s fault . . .” Durito says, as if he were talking about a drinking buddy.

“You mean you also saw Joaquín Sabina?”<sup>14</sup>

“But of course! He wanted me to help him with the musical arrangements for his next record. But don’t interrupt me. It happened that Sabina and I were bar hopping and chasing women in Madrid, when we reached Las Ramblas.”

“But that’s in Barcelona!”

“Yes, there’s the mystery. Because a few minutes before we had been in a dive in Madrid, captivated by an olive-skinned beauty, an Andalusian from Jaén, to be more precise, and then I had to go and satisfy one of those biological needs they call ‘primary.’ That’s when I mistook the doors, and, instead of the one for the ‘water closet,’ I opened the one to the street. And it turns out that it was in Las Ramblas. Yes, there was no longer any Madrid, nor Sabina, nor dive, nor olive skin, but I still needed a ‘water closet’ because a gentleman can’t go about doing those things in just any corner. Ergo, I looked for a bar, trying to remember from when I used to hang out with Manolo . . .”

“I imagine you’re referring to Manuel Vázquez Montalbán,” I ask, ready to not be astonished by anything.<sup>15</sup>

“Yes, but it’s too long a name, so I just call him ‘Manolo.’ Then I was anxiously, restlessly and feverishly looking for someplace with a ‘water closet’ when there appeared in front of me, in a dark alley, three gigantic shadows . . .”

“Bandits!” I interrupted, startled.

“Negative. They were three trash dumpsters, under whose shadow I calculated that I could do, intimately and discreetly, what I was thinking of doing in the ‘water closet.’ And so I did. So, with the satisfaction of the duty accomplished, I lit my pipe and heard, with absolute clarity, the twelve chimes from ‘Big Ben.’”

“But, Durito, that’s in London, England . . .”

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14 See note in “Durito II”

15 See note in “To Lady Civil Society.”

“Yes, it seemed strange to me as well, but what wasn’t that night? I walked until I came to a sign that read ‘Pirates. Wanted. No previous experience required. Prefer Beetles and Knights–errant. Information at The Black Speck bar.’” Durito lights his pipe and continues,

“I continued walking, looking for The Black Speck’s sign. I was feeling my way, barely making out corners and walls, so thick was the fog that was falling over the alleys of Copenhagen that early morning . . .”

“Copenhagen? But weren’t you in London?”

“Look, if you keep interrupting me with the obvious, I’ll send you to the plank and from there to the sharks. I already told you that everything was quite strange, and if I had read the sign soliciting pirates in London, I was then looking for The Black Speck bar in Copenhagen, Denmark. I got lost for a few minutes in the Tivoli Gardens, but I kept on looking. Suddenly, on a corner, I found it. A pale light filtered from a solitary street lamp, barely piercing the fog, illuminating a sign that read ‘The Black Speck. Bar and Table Dance. Special Discount for Beetles and Knights–Errant.’ Not before appreciating the high regard and affection they hold in Europe for beetles and knights–errant . . .”

“Maybe because they don’t suffer from them,” I barely murmured.

“Don’t think that the irony of your murmurings escapes me,” Durito says. “But, for the good of your readers, I will continue with my narrative. There will be time enough to settle accounts with you.

“I was saying that, after appreciating the great intelligence of the Europeans for recognizing and admiring the greatness that some of us beings possess, I entered this bar in Montmartre, close to ‘Sacre Coeur’ . . .”

Durito stays silent for a moment, waiting for me to interrupt him by saying that that is in Paris, France, but I say nothing. Durito nods with satisfaction and continues:

“Once inside, a purple haze invaded the atmosphere. I sat down at a table in the darkest corner. It didn’t take a second for a waiter, in perfect German, to tell me, ‘Welcome to East Berlin,’ and, without saying anything else, left me what I took to be the *carte* or menu. I opened it, and it consisted of one single sentence: ‘Pirates in training, second floor.’ I went up a staircase that was just behind me. I reached a long corridor flanked by some windows. Through one of them the canals and 400 bridges that raise Amsterdam above the 90 islands could be seen. In the distance the ‘White Tower’ could be seen, which reminds the Greeks of Salonica of the extremes of intolerance. Still along the corridor, further ahead, another window offered a view of the curved peak of the Swiss Matterhorn. Further along could be made out the miraculous stones of the Irish Blarney Castle that give the gift of words to whomever kisses them. On the left, rose the bell tower of the main Square in Bruges, Belgium. Following the corridor, before coming to a dilapidated door, a window looked towards the Plaza of Miracoli, and, by stretching one’s hand a bit, one could touch the swooning incline of the Tower of Pisa.



“Yes, that corridor looked out on half of Europe, and I wouldn’t have been surprised if there had been a sign on the door that said ‘Welcome to the Maastricht Treaty.’<sup>16</sup> But, no, the door didn’t even have a sign on it. What’s more, it didn’t have a latch. I knocked, and nothing. I pushed the heavy sheet of wood, and it gave way without difficulty. A mournful creaking accompanied the opening of the door . . .

“I then entered a room that was in partial darkness. Inside, on a table full of papers, an oil lamp poorly illuminated the face of a man of indefinite age, a patch covered his right eye and he had a hook for a hand that pulled at his whiskers. The man’s gaze was fixed on the table. Nothing was heard, and the silence was so heavy that it clung like dust to the skin.” Durito brushed the dust off his pirate suit.

“‘Now there’s a Pirate,’ I said to myself, and I moved towards the table. The man didn’t move at all. I coughed a bit, which is what we educated gentlemen do to attract attention. The pirate did not lift his gaze. Instead, a little parrot (that I just then noticed on his left shoulder) began reciting, with such excellent intonation that even Don José de Espronceda would have applauded, the line that goes: ‘With ten cannons on each side, wind at the stern, full sail, it does not cross the sea, it flies, a swift sailing brig.’”<sup>17</sup>

“‘Sit down,’ he said. I don’t know if it was the man or the parrot, but the pirate, or the one I supposed was a pirate, handed me a piece of paper without saying a word. I read it. I will not bore your readers or you, so I will tell you, to summarize, that it was an application to join the ‘Great Brotherhood of Pirates, Buccaneers and Terrors of the Sea A.C. of C.V. of R.O.’ I filled it out without delay, not without, of course, underlining my status as beetle and knight-errant. I handed the paper to the man and he read it in silence.”

“Upon finishing, he looked at me slowly with his one eye and told me,

“I was waiting for you, Don Durito. Know that I am the last true, living pirate in the world. And I say “true” because now there are an infinite number of “pirates” in financial centers and great government palaces who steal, kill, destroy and loot, without ever touching any water save that found in their bathtubs. Here is your mission (he hands me a dossier of old parchments): find the treasure and put it in a safe place. Now, pardon me, but I must die.’ And as he said those words, he let his head fall to the table. Yes, he was dead. The parrot took flight and went out through a window, saying, ‘The exile of Mitilini is dead, dead is the bastard son of Lesbos, dead the pride of the Aegean Sea.’<sup>18</sup> Open your nine doors, fear-some hell, for there the great Redbeard will rest. He has found the one who will

16 The Maastricht Treaty, which established the European Union in 1993, marked an important step toward the creation of a neoliberal Europe. It laid the basis for the creation of a Europe-wide monetary union and common currency (the Euro) by requiring member governments to impose anti-wage austerity as a condition for full participation. The Treaty guaranteed the free movement of capital and, along with the Schengen Agreement, unified the EU’s policies for restricting the movement of labor.

17 From the poem “The Pirate’s Song.” See note 32.

follow in his footsteps, and the one who made of the ocean but a tear now sleeps. The pride of true Pirates will now sail with Black Shield.' Below the window, the Swedish port of Gothenburg spread out, and, in the distance, a *nyckelharpa* was weeping . . ."<sup>19</sup>

"And what did you do?" I asked, now completely immersed in the story (although a bit seasick from so many names of places and locales).

"Without even opening the dossier of parchments, I retraced my steps. I went back down the corridor and down to the Table Dance-Bar, I opened the door and I went out into the night, right onto the Paseo de Pereda, in Santander, on the Cantabrian Sea. I headed towards Bilbao, entering Euskal Herria. Near Donostia-San Sebastian, I saw young people dancing the *Eurresku* and *Ezpatadantza* to the rhythm of the *txistu* and drum.<sup>20</sup> I climbed the Pyrenees and came to the Ebro River once more between Huesca and Zaragoza. There I managed to find a vessel and I continued on to the delta where the Mediterranean receives the Ebro, in the midst of the roar of the Vent de Dalt.<sup>21</sup> I climbed Tarragonia again on foot, and from there, to Barcelona, passing by where the famous Battle of Montjuic took place."<sup>22</sup> Durito pauses, as if to gather speed.

"In Barcelona, I set off on a freighter that carried me to Palma de Mallorca. We headed southeast, skirting Valencia and, further south, Alicante. We sighted Almeria, and, far off, Granada. Throughout Andalucia, a flamenco song set palms, guitars and heels in motion. A giant *zambra* accompanied us until, after doubling back by way of Algeciras, we crossed Cadiz, and at the mouth of the Guadalquivir, 'voices of death sounded,' coming from Cordoba and Seville."<sup>23</sup> A

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18 This passage refers to Barbarossa who was born in Mitilini on the island of Lesbos in the Aegean Sea and wound up in Constantinople as the Admiral of the Sultan's fleet.

19 A *nyckelharpa* is a traditional Swedish stringed instrument played with a bow and keys that slide under the strings.

20 *Eurresku* (or *aurresku*) is an open circle dance with individuals performing spectacular and difficult steps in the center of the circle. *Ezpatadantza* is a kind of canopy dance, usually performed with swords or staffs. The *txistu* is a small, four-fingered flute played with the left hand while the right hand beats a drum (*taboril*) with a drumstick.

21 *El Vent de Dalt* means, literally, the Wind from Above. A strong wind blows down the Ebro River Valley from the Pyrenees to the coast of Catalonia. The zone upstream from the Ebro's delta is known as the "upper river" (*rebera de Dalt* in Catalan); the wind that roars through the delta is known as *El Vent de Dalt*.

22 Tarragonia is a region in Catalonia south of Barcelona. During the Thirty Years War, the Spanish king Philip IV sent an army to Catalonia to draw the province into war against the French. The Catalans, however, revolted, declared a Republic and allied with the French. When the Spanish army tried to subdue the rebels in Barcelona they were decisively defeated by the Catalans in a battle at Montjuic on January 26, 1641.

23 A *zambra* is both a gypsy party and a slow sensuous dance of Moorish origins now claimed by both Flamenco and belly dance. "Voices of death sounded near Guadalquivir" is a line from Federico García Lorca's poem "The Death of Antoñito El Camborio." See also note in "Durito Names Marcos His Squire."

*cante jondo* called out, ‘Go to sleep now, Durito, beloved son of the world, leave your aimless wandering, and end your beautiful dance.’<sup>24</sup> We could still just make out Huelva, and then we headed to the seven main Canary Islands. There we made landfall and I gathered a bit of sap from the tree they call ‘Drago,’ good, they say, for the ills of body and soul. That’s how I arrived at the island of Lanzarote and had the altercation with Don Pepe, which I’ve already related to you.”

“Uff! You’ve traveled far,” I say, weary from the mere telling of Durito’s travels.

“And what I’ve left out!” he said, proudly.

I ask,

“Then, you are no longer a knight-errant?”

“Of course I am! The ‘pirate’ thing is temporary. Only while I carry out the mission entrusted to me by the deceased Redbeard.”

Durito keeps staring at me.

I think: Whenever Durito stares at me like that it’s because . . . because . . .

“No!” I tell him.

“‘No’ what? I haven’t even said anything to you,” says Durito, feigning surprise.

“No, you haven’t said anything to me, but that look doesn’t mean anything good. Whatever you’re going to tell me, my answer is ‘no.’ I have enough problems as a guerrilla to get involved now as a buccaneer. And I’m not crazy enough to set sail in a sardine can!”

“‘Pirate,’ not ‘Buccaneer.’ It’s not the same thing, my dear and large-nosed cabin boy. And it’s not a sardine can, it’s a frigate and it’s called ‘Learn From the Mistakes of Others.’”

I ignore the insult and reply,

“‘Learn From Others’ Mistakes’? Hmmmm, strange name. But, in the end, ‘Buccaneer’ or ‘Pirate,’ or whatever it is, it means trouble.”

“As you wish, but, before anything else, you should carry out your duty,” Durito says solemnly.

“My duty?” I ask, letting down my guard.

“Yes, you should communicate the good news to the entire world.”

“What ‘good news?’”

“Why, that I’ve returned. And it doesn’t have to be one of those long, dense, and boring communiqués with which you torture your readers. What’s more, so as not to run any risks, I have a draft here.”

Having said that, Durito takes a paper out from one of his bags.

I read and re-read. I turn to look at Durito and start with the ‘no, no and no’ that begins this tale.

In order to not bore you any more, I’ll tell you that Durito was trying to get me to release a letter or communiqué destined for national and international civ-

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24 *Cante jondo* is type of flamenco song characterized by its mournful rhythm and tone.

il society, announcing that Durito had now returned.

Of course I refused, since I had to respond to the letter sent to us by those participating in the International Civil Commission for Human Rights Observation (CCIODH), asking us to grant them the same trust which we gave them in 1998, to receive them and give them our word, since they would soon come for a new visit.<sup>25</sup> Here it is then:

Zapatista Army of National Liberation

Mexico, October of 1999

To the International Civil Commission of Human Rights Observation

Brothers and Sisters:

In the name of the children, women, men and elders of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation and of the Indigenous Communities in Resistance, I am communicating to you that it would be an honor for us that you visit these lands. You have our trust; you will be treated with the respect you deserve as international observers, and you will not have, on our part, any impediments to your humanitarian work. We will also be pleased to talk with you. We await you.

*Vale. Salud*, and remember that here, in addition to dignity, mud also abounds.

From the Island that 'Has No Name,' excuse me,  
From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast

Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos

Mexico, "Learn From the Mistakes of Others" Frigate

Beware: Postscripts follow.

P.S. that extends its arm for twisting.

It so happens that, following my repeated negatives, Durito convinced me, offering me part of the treasure. Yes, we have reviewed the parchments, and there's a treasure map. Of course, we still need to decipher them, but the prospect of an adventure is irresistible.

And Durito's text? After arduous negotiation, we agreed that it would go as a postscript. Ergo, here follows the . . .

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25 The Comisión Civil Internacional de Observación por los Derechos Humanos (CCIODH), an organization of 230 activists from 13 countries, began to investigate Mexico's human rights record in 1997 with special attention to the situation in Chiapas. The first visit took place February 16-28, 1998 and was followed by a report to the European Parliament. The second visit took place November 15-25, 1999. In keeping with a more general campaign to exclude foreign observers, the Zedillo administration denied FM3 visas (non-tourist) to many of the CCIODH delegates.

P.S. for National and International Civil Society

Madame:

It is my honor to communicate to you the super-duper [that's what Durito's text says] good news, the gift that will cause young and old to rejoice. Let the great financial centers tremble! Let panic reach the palaces of great and false gentlemen! Let those from below celebrate! Let the most beautiful maidens prepare their finest gowns and let the spring of their wombs sigh! Let good men tip their hats! Let children dance with joy! The best and greatest of pirates [crossed out in the original], excuse me, of knights-errant that the world has ever known, has returned! Don Durito de la Lacandona! (copyrights reserved) [that's what Durito's text says]. Hooray for humanity! Our most heartfelt condolences to neoliberalism. He is here, the great, I mean 'great,' gigantic, marvelous, superlative, hyper-mega-plus, super-califragilisticespialidocious [that's what Durito's text says, the one and only, the incomparable, he, THE, Don Durito de La Lacandona!

Yesssss! [that's what Durito's text says].

End of Durito's text (from which I totally distance myself).

Well then. Durito is back now. (Sigh). I don't know why my head began to ache.

*Vale. Salud*, and does anyone have an aspirin?

The SupPirate (extraordinarily handsome with the patch over his right eye) (punsters, abstain).<sup>26</sup>

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26 The Spanish for "patch over the eye," *parche en el ojo*, is also a slang expression for sodomy.