

The Hand That Dreams When It Writes



Following the arrival of the March for Indigenous Dignity in the Mexico City, Durito informs Marcos about how he used to make a living in the area around Azcapotzalco—one of the UAM campuses where the Zapatistas met with students. Durito also offers a short discourse on “doing politics” in which he mocks professional politicians, such as those who undermined the efforts of the Zapatistas to address the nation’s legislators. Faced with consistent public support, the government capitulated and heard the Zapatista delegation on March 28, 2001.

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March 20, 2001

Words of the EZLN at the Autonomous Metropolitan University,
Azcapotzalco

Brothers and sisters of the UAM-Azcapotzalco,

Brothers and sisters of the neighborhoods of Northwest Mexico City:

You must all excuse me, but I have not managed to prepare anything special for this event. I have, therefore, resorted to the advice of a specialist in local issues, because, he says, he once worked in what was previously a refinery near here.¹

As you are, surely, very knowledgeable about the history of the lands you walk, you will already know that I am referring to Durito, known (he says) at that time as “Heavy Metal Durito,” and not exactly for his rock-and-roll talents, but because he would swipe scraps from the refinery and resell them as archeological pieces to Coparmex managers who, as everyone knows, are very knowledgeable about history, and have always been concerned with the preservation of historical patrimony.²

“It was really easy,” Durito tells me. “They only had to see that the pieces were oxidized and rusted to be convinced that they belonged to an ancient civilization.”

Durito studied at the UAM and was a professor there, and he had to engage in these things in order to pay for his tuition and supplement his salary.³

Durito became bored quickly because, he said, there was no glory in swindling imbeciles, and he thought it would be better to fight for the helpless. So he became a university worker and affiliated with the SITUAM.⁴ They fired him when he tried to introduce the job category of “Beetle ‘C’, part-time worker.” It was then that he moved from “AZCA,” as he says, and went to other refineries that demanded his modest efforts and his precocious managerial initiative.

Durito, as everyone already knows (and if you don’t know, well, you’re spending your tuition for no reason), embraced the noble profession of knight-

1 The PEMEX refinery named “18 de Marzo” (“March 18”) after the date of the nationalization of Mexican oil, was renowned for environmental and safety violations. Although Carlos Salinas was credited with its closure and conversion into a park, the closure was the result of protests by local activists and environmentalists, following a hazardous fire.

2 COPARMEX, the Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana (Employers’ Confederation of the Republic of Mexico) is a syndicate of Mexican industrialists formed in 1929.

3 In 1973 the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM) opened three campuses: Azcapotzalco, Iztapalapa, and Xochimilco. UAM is the second largest university in Mexico City with an enrollment of 40,000 students.

4 The 7,000-member union Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (SITUAM) walked out in February 1996 demanding a 100 percent wage increase. After a 43-day strike, the SITUAM ended the walkout on March 14, 1996, accepting a 16-percent wage increase PRI officials had insisted on all along.

errantry, and he learned a million-and-one arts, as well as a wealth of knowledge that would put the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and all its cybernetic links to shame, reducing it to the category of paperback dictionary with the brand name “The Crummy Inc., Ltd, TM,” whose slogan is “The junk closest to your pocket.”

It’s here that I asked Durito if he knew why the “hardliners” in the Congress didn’t want to engage in dialogue with the Zapatistas. And here is what he told me:

“My dear and flu-ridden peanut-nose . . .”

“It’s not the flu, it’s the IMECAS,” I interrupted him.⁵

“So be it,” Durito conceded. “Don’t think those scoundrels deny you an ear and their word because of that hideous ski-mask, since it’s common knowledge that you’d be even more hideous without it . . .”

Durito pauses so that all of you can start shouting that marvelous slogan that reconciles us with ourselves, that goes: “You are not ugly, you are not ugly!”⁶

Since the slogan is just a slogan, and reality is reality and nothing more, Durito presses on:

“You must find the reason yourself in what I am going to relate to you . . .

“The professional politician is accustomed to confronting life as if it were one of those pencils that almost no one uses anymore: the ones with lead at one end and an eraser on the other. Doing politics has come to be like that, a continuous writing and erasing, always trying to improve the line of the letters and their complex stringing together to make words, which is also how worlds are named. With the eraser they try to correct errors, to start each page over again, to embellish the letters, to refine the word, to decorate the world. The politician always strives to improve his penmanship, and he makes Power a magnificent pencil sharpener with which he files his words and makes them elegant and seductive. He amazes not a few, and some applaud him. But a pencil sharpener, as every student knows, in addition to sharpening the pencil, also uses it up. Soon it is so small that it becomes useless, and it ends up, like everything Power grinds down, in the wastebasket.

“Another pencil then takes its place, and the line of politics begins again. The intellectuals call the dead letters “democratic change.” But Power is always ready to offer a pencil sharpener, and there will always be a wastebasket for the sharpened pencils of politics.

5 In an effort to gauge Air Quality Standards (AQS) in Mexico City, the government introduced IMECAS as a single measurement of combined air pollutants including carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, ozone, and lead. 100 IMECAS represents “clean” or “acceptable” air.

6 Throughout the march and at Zapatista appearances, crowds of supporters would shout: “*No están solos, no están solos*,” (“You are not alone”). Marcos suggests that once his mask is removed and his countenance revealed the crowds would be forced to shout “You are not ugly” as a gesture of solidarity.

“The history of those who are the Power in politics only repeats itself: the words are the same, only the line of the letters changes, their slant, their flourish-es, their size. But the words do not change, and, ergo, neither do the worlds.

“The problem, then, is not the beauty of the letters, but that words announce the worlds that, after leaving them behind, give birth to other words, and so on.

“For example, at times a pencil is not even necessary. At times it is enough for a hand to trace a name on the sea or the sand, that is a world in which there are two: the one who is named and the one who has in his hand the bridge that their mutual tomorrow creates.”

“Did you understand?” Durito asks me.

“Sure,” I respond. “It’s better to use an automatic pencil, the kind that changes its answers.”

“Good heavens! What strange and perverse wizard has cursed me by selecting you as my assistant? In truth I tell you, I have never known a companion so long of nose and so short of brains. Automatic pencil, my foot! Think, you dope!”

“A nib, then?” I insinuate timidly.

Durito exploded: “It’s too much! I’m losing the best years of my life trying to educate a scoundrel like you! To the devil with nibs as well! And let’s go, because we have to get to Azcapotzalco, and then to Iztapalapa, and afterwards to Xochimilco, where the ones who designed it divided up this university, thinking it would be easier to control that way. And you see now, divided and everything, Zapatista it is, and Zapatista it will be.”

“Let’s go, then,” I say, resigned, but, without Durito noticing, I throw away the indelible ink marker with which I wrote in one of the bathrooms, “UAM-Azcapotzalco has two ‘Z’s’ so that, even if they want to abbreviate it, it will always be Zapatista.”

Vale. Salud, and don’t think I didn’t understand. The issue is not what you write with, but the hand that dreams when it writes. And that is what the pencil is afraid of, that is, the realization that it is not necessary.

From the Azcapotzalco Unit of the Autonomous Metropolitan University

Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee - General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation

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