By the same author:

Memory of Fire: I. Genesis
Memory of Fire: III. Century of the Wind

Eduardo Galeano

MEMORY OF FIRE

II. FACES AND MASKS
Part Two of a Trilogy

Translated
by Cedric Belfrage

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Northward goes the long caravan of carts, horses, people on foot. As they go, the land that will be called Uruguay is stripped of those who want a fatherland. The land itself goes with its children, goes in them, and nothing is left behind. Not even an ash, not even silence.

_1812: Cochabamba_

Women

From Cochabamba, many men have fled. Not one woman. On the hillside, a great clamor. Cochabamba's plebian women, at bay, fight from the center of a circle of fire.

Surrounded by five thousand Spaniards, they resist with battered tin guns and a few arquebuses; and they fight to the last yell, whose echoes will resound throughout the long war for independence. Whenever his army weakens, General Manuel Belgrano will shout those words which never fail to restore courage and spark anger. The general will ask his vacillating soldiers: Are the women of Cochabamba present?

_Convent. Perched on the ruins of the altar, the monk demands punishment for those who brought on God's wrath.

"Vengeance!" roars the scourge of Christ, and his accusing finger points at a patriot officer who, his arms crossed, contemplates the scene. The crowd turns against the officer—short, bony, in a brilliant uniform—and advances to crush him.

Simón Bolívar neither implores nor retreats: he attacks. Sword in hand he plunges through the frenzy, mounts the altar and with one blow topples the apocalyptic monk.
The people, silent, disperse._

_1813: Chilpancingo_

Independence Is Revolution or a Lie

In three military campaigns Morelos has won a good part of Mexico. The Congress of the future republic, a wandering congress, travels behind its leader. The deputies sleep on the ground and eat soldiers' rations.

By the light of a thick tallow candle Morelos draws up the essentials of the national Constitution. He proposes a free, independent, and Catholic America; substitutes an income tax for Indian tributes and increases the wages of the poor; confiscates the goods of the enemy; establishes freedom of commerce, but with tariff barriers; suppresses slavery and torture and liquidates the caste system, which bases social differences on the color of skin, so that only vice and virtue distinguish one American from another.

The rich Creoles go from shock to shock as Morelos's troops march along expropriating fortunes and dividing up haciendas. A war against Spain or a rising of the serfs? This is not the sort of independence they were hoping for. They will make another.

_1814: San Mateo_

Boves

In Venezuela the word independence still does not mean much more than freedom of commerce for rich Creoles.

Blacks and browns look to the chief of the Spaniards, a Hercules with red beard and green eyes, as their leader. Slaves run away to
find José Tomás Rodríguez Boves, *Papa* Boves. Ten thousand prairie horsemen set fire to plantations and cut masters’ throats in the name of God and the king. Boves’s flag, a skull on black ground, promises pillage and revenge, war to the death against the cacao oligarchy who want independence from Spain. On the plains of San Mateo, Boves rides his horses into the mansion of the Bolívar family and carves his name with a knife on the door of the main vestibule.

The spear does not repent; the bullet does not repent. Before killing with lead, Boves shoots salvos of gunpowder, for the pleasure of seeing the expressions on his victims’ faces. Among his bravest soldiers he divides up the young ladies of the best families. He enjoys bullfighting elegant patriots, after sticking banderillas in their necks. He cuts heads off as if it were a joke.

Before long now, a spear will pierce him. He will be buried with bound feet.

1815: *San Cristóbal Ecatepec*

The Lake Comes for Him

On the thorny ridge of Tezmalaca the Spaniards catch José María Morelos. After so many mistakes and defeats, they hunt him down in the brambles, his clothing in shreds, without weapons or spurs.

They chain him. They insult him. Lieutenant-Colonel Eugenio Villasana asks, “What would you do if you were the winner, and I the defeated?”

“Give you two hours to confess,” says the priest Morelos, “and shoot you.”

They take him to the secret cells of the Inquisition.
They humiliate him on his knees. They shoot him in the back.

The viceroy says that the rebel died repentant. The Mexican people say that the lake heard the firing squad’s blast and overflowed to carry off the body.

1815: *Mérida, Yucatán*

Ferdinand VII

The starched gentlemen of Yucatán cross the Plaza de Armas in Mérida, whitened by dust and sun, and enter the cathedral in very solemn procession. From the shade of its portico, the Indian tamale and necklace vendors don’t understand why the bells ring so merrily, or know whose is that crowned head that the gentlemen carry on a banner.

The colonial aristocracy is celebrating the news from Madrid. It has been belatedly learned that the French were driven out and Ferdinand VII reigns in Spain. Messengers report that the cry being heard around the monarch is “Long live chains!” As court jesters tinkle their little bells, King Ferdinand orders the guerrillas who brought him to the throne jailed or shot, revives the Inquisition, and restores the privileges of the clergy and nobility.
1815: Curuzú-Cuatiá
The Hides Cycle on the River Plata

On the tip of a spear, the sharp-edged half-moon reaches for the fleeing animal's legs. Just one slash: the horseman strikes with sure aim, and the calf limps and gasps and falls. The horseman dismounts. He cuts the throat and begins to skin.

He does not always kill that way. Easier to drive the maverick cattle with yells into the corrales and knife them there, thousands and thousands of wild cattle or horses stampeded to their death; easier yet to surprise the animals in the hills by night, while they sleep.

The gaucho pulls off the hide and stakes it out in the sun. Of the remainder, what the mouth doesn't want is left for the crows.

The Robertson brothers, John and William, Scottish merchants, go around these lands with sacks that look like sausages, stuffed with gold coins. From an estancia in Curuzú-Cuatiá they send ten thousand hides to the town of Goya, in sixty carts.

The enormous wooden wheels creak as they turn, and goats urge the oxen on. The carts cut through the countryside. They climb hills, cross swamps and swollen rivers. At nightfall the encircled carts form a hearth. While the gauchos smoke and drink maté, the air thickens with the aroma of meat browning on the embers. After the roast, yarns are exchanged and guitars heard.

From the town of Goya, the hides will travel on to the port of Buenos Aires and cross the ocean to the tanneries of Liverpool. The price will have multiplied many times when the hides return to the River Plata, converted into boots, shoes, and whips of British manufacture.

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1815: Buenos Aires
The Bluebloods Seek a King in Europe

The goose-quill pen writes: José Artigas, traitor to his country.

In vain they have offered him gold and glory. Shopkeepers expert in yard-measures and precise balances, the patricians of Buenos Aires calculate the price of Artigas dead or alive. They are ready to pay six thousand duros for the head of the leader of the rebel camps.

To exorcise these lands of the gaucho devil, Carlos de Alvear offers them to the English: These provinces, Alvear writes to Lord Castlereagh, want to belong to Great Britain without any conditions. And he implores Lord Strangford: The British Nation cannot abandon to their fate the inhabitants of the River Plata in the very act of throwing themselves into its generous arms . . .

Manuel de Sarratea journeys to London in search of a monarch to crown in Buenos Aires. The interior, republican and federal, threatens the privileges of the port, and panic prevails over any oath of allegiance. In Madrid, Manuel Belgrano and Bernardino Rivadavia, who had been ardent republicans, offer the throne to the Infante Francisco de Paula, brother of Ferdinand VII. The port city's emissaries promise hereditary power embracing all the River Plata region, Chile, and even Peru. The new independent kingdom would have a blue and white flag; freedom and property would be sacred and the court would be formed by distinguished Creoles promoted into dukes, counts, and marquesses.

Nobody accepts.

(2 and 278)

1815: Purification Camp
Artigas

Here, where the river gets mad and boils up in eddies and whirlpools, on a purple tableland surrounded by hollows and canyons, General Artigas governs. These thousand hearths of poor Creoles, these huts of mud and straw and leather windows, are the capital of the confederation of peoples of the River Plata interior. In front of the government shack, horses await the messengers who gallop back and forth bringing advice and taking decrees. No trimmings or medals adorn the uniform of the leader of the south.

Artigas, son of the prairie, had been a smuggler and a hunter of smugglers. He knew the meanderings of every river, the secrets of every hill, the savor of the grass of each field; and even more deeply, the diffident souls of the cowboys who only have their lives to give and give them fighting in a hallucinating whirlwind of spears.

The banners of Artigas fly over the region watered by the Uruguay and Paraná rivers, which extends to the sierras of Córdoba. Sharing this immense space are the provinces that refuse to be a colony of Buenos Aires after winning their liberation from Spain.
The port of Buenos Aires lives with its back to the land that it despises and fears. Glued to their lookout windows, the merchants await ships that bring novelties of dress, speech, and thought, but no king.

Against the avalanche of European merchandise, Artigas wants to build dikes to defend our arts and factories—with free passage only for machines, books, and medicines; and he diverts to the port of Montevideo the provincial trade over which Buenos Aires had long assumed a monopoly. The Artiguista federal league wants no king, but assemblies and congresses of citizens; and to top off the scandal, the leader decrees agrarian reform.

(277 and 278)

1816: East Bank Ranges

Agrarian Reform

In Buenos Aires they are crying bloody murder. East of the Uruguay River, Artigas expropriates the lands of the Belgrano and Mitre families, of the family of San Martín's father-in-law, of Bernardino Rivadavia, of Azcuénaga and Almagro and Díaz Vélez. In Montevideo they call the agrarian reform a criminal project. Artigas has jailed Lucas Obes, Juan María Pérez and other artists of the minuet and legerdemain.

For the owners of land, devourers of acreage eaten by grace of king, fraud, or plunder, the gaucho is cannon fodder or estancia serf—and anyone denying it should be put in the stocks or up against a wall.

Artigas wants every gaucho to own a piece of land. Poor folk invade the estancias. In the eastern ranges devastated by war, huts and tilled plots and corrals begin to sprout. The trampled peasantry starts to trample. The men who put their lives on the line in the war of independence refuse to accept further abandonment. For the Montevideo town council, Encarnación Benítez, Artigas's soldier who gallops about dividing land and cattle at the head of a troop of villains, is an outlaw, pervert, vagrant, and agitator. In the shade of his spear poor people find refuge; but this brown man, illiterate, courageous, perhaps fierce, will never be a statue, nor will any avenue or street or byroad ever bear his name.

(335)

1816: Chicote Hill

The Art of War

On Chicote Hill the royalist infantry have surrounded a handful of patriots of Upper Peru.

"I don't give myself up to the enemy!" yells the soldier Pedro Loayza, and throws himself over the precipice.

"We'll die for the fatherland!" proclaims commandant Eusebio Lira, as he too runs for the precipice.

"We'll die if we're idiots," drum major José Santos Vargas says abruptly, cutting him off.

"Let's set fire to the dry grass," proposes sergeant Julián Reinaga.

The tall grass blazes up and the wind fans the flames toward the enemy ranks. The fire thrusts forward in waves. Confused and terrified, the besiegers flee, throwing rifles and cartridge belts to the winds and imploring the Almighty for pity.

(347)

1816: Tarabuco

Juana Azurduy.

well versed in catechisms, born to be a nun in the Chuquisaca convent, is a lieutenant colonel in the guerrilla armies of independence. Of her four children the only survivor is the one who was born in the heat of battle, amid the thunder of horses and guns. The head of her husband is stuck high up on a Spanish pike.

Juana rides in the mountains in front of her men. Her sky-blue shawl flutters in the wind. One fist clutches the reins; the other severs necks with a sword.

Everything she eats is turned into bravery. The Indians do not call her Juana. They call her Pachamama; they call her Mother Earth.

(126)
1816: Port-au-Prince

Haiti lies in ruins, blockaded by the French and isolated by everyone else. No country has recognized the independence of the slaves who defeated Napoleon.

The island is divided in two.

In the north, Henri Christophe has proclaimed himself emperor. In the castle of Sans-Souci, the new black nobility dance the minuet—the Duke of Marmalade, the Count of Lemonade—while black lackeys in snowy wigs bow and scrape, and black hussars parade their plumed bonnets through gardens copied from Versailles.

In the south, Alexandre Pétion presides over the republic. Distributing lands among the former slaves, Pétion aims to create a nation of peasants, very poor but free and armed, on the ashes of plantations destroyed by the war.

On Haiti’s southern coast Simón Bolívar lands, in search of refuge and aid. He comes from Jamaica, where he has sold everything down to his watch. No one believes in his cause. His brilliant military campaigns have been no more than a mirage. Francisco Miranda is dying in chains in the Cadiz arsenal, and the Spaniards have reconquered Venezuela and Colombia, which prefer the past or still do not believe in the future promised by the patriots.

Pétion receives Bolívar as soon as he arrives, on New Year’s Day. He gives him seven ships, two hundred and fifty men, muskets, powder, provisions, and money. He makes only one condition. Pétion, born a slave, son of a black woman and a Frenchman, demands of Bolívar the freedom of slaves in the lands he is going to liberate.

Bolívar shakes his hand. The war will change its course. Perhaps America will too.

(115, 116, and 202)

1817: Santiago de Chile

The Devil at Work

Elegant youths smoke cigarettes in gold holders so as not to stain their fingers, but Santiago de Chile is bounded on all four sides by garbage. To the north, the houses look out on the Mapocho River garbage dump. To the south, trash piles up in the ravine. The sun rises on mountains of rubbish on Santa Lucía hill and its last rays light up the dumps in the San Miguel and San Pablo suburbs.

From one of these dumps sprouted the visitor who crossed the city last night, a sulphurous salvo that made the little tallow candles quiver in the street lamps, and that curiously or threateningly nosed around the Compañía temple until the night watchman’s voice intoned eleven o’clock:

“Hail Mary full of gra-ace!”

The Devil fled hell-for-leather.

The shoe he lost is tourug Santiago, house to house. A monk carries it, covered by a napkin, on a silver tray. Pious ladies cross themselves.

(256)

1817: Santiago de Chile

Manuel Rodríguez

Whoever talks of American emancipation signs his own death warrant. Whoever gets a letter from Mendoza marches to the gallows or the firing squad. The Vigilance Tribunal gives free rein to informers in Santiago de Chile.
Between Mendoza and Santiago, patriots are reorganizing the army ground to pieces by the Spaniards. Winds of resistance come and go, crossing the splendor of the cordillera's snow, without leaving a trace.

The messenger passes an order at the cockfights in Santiago, and another at a smart soiree, and at the same time picks up a report between two horseraces in the suburbs. The messenger announces himself at a big house—three taps of the doorknocker—and at the same time emerges in the mountains on the back of a mule, and gallops over prairies on horseback. The guerrilla makes an assault on Melipilla, but he is also crossing the town of San Fernando. Striking in Rancagua, the guerrilla dismounts in Pomaire and drinks a glass of wine.

The Spanish governor has put a price on the head of Manuel Rodriguez, the messenger, the guerrilla. But his head travels hidden beneath the monk's hood, the muleteer's sombrero, the street peddler's basket, or the fine gentleman's plush topper. No one can catch him because he flies without moving and goes out inward and comes in outward.

(106)

1817: Montevideo
Images for an Epic

An enormous army comes from Rio de Janeiro, by land and sea, with the mission of wiping out José Artigas, of obliterating even the shadow of a memory of his contagious example. With fire and sword, the Brazilians invade, announcing that they will clear the bandits off these plains. General Lecor promises to restore the damaged rights of property and heredity.

Lecor enters Montevideo beneath a canopy. Father Larrañaga and Francisco Javier de Viana offer the keys of the city to the redeemers of the great estates. Ladies throw flowers and little blue bows in the path of this phenomenal parade of braid, decorations, and plumes. Bored tolling for funerals, the cathedral bells ring out. Censers swing to and fro, and so do businessmen; their bowings and scrapings never end.

(195, 278, and 335)

1817: Quito
Manuela Sáenz

Quito was born between volcanoes, high, far from the sea; and between the cathedral and the palace, in the central plaza, was born Manuela. She arrived in Quito on a satín bed, on sheets from Brussels, daughter of a secret love affair of Don Simón Sáenz, killer of the Creoles who rose in rebellion here.

At fifteen, Manuela wore men's clothes, smoked, and broke in horses. She did not ride side-saddle like the ladies, but with open legs, and scorning harness. Her best friend was her black slave Jonatas, who meowed like a cat, sang like a bird, and when she walked undulated like a snake. Manuela was sixteen when they shut her up in one of this prayerful and sinful city's many convents, where monks help old nuns to die a good death and young ones to live a good life. In the Santa Catalina convent Manuela learned to embroider, to play the clavichord, to feign virtue, and to faint, rolling back her eyes. At seventeen, crazy about uniforms, she eloped with Fausto D'Elluyar, an officer of the king.

At twenty, she sparkles. All the men want to be the oyster of this pearl. They marry her to James Thorne, a respectable English doctor. The party lasts a whole week.

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1818: Colonia Camp
The War of the Underdogs

By now, Artigas's army is nothing but naked people. Those who own no more property than a horse, as well as the blacks and the Indians, know that in this war everyone's destiny is at stake. From fields and rivers groups of mounted rebels attack the well-armed Brazilians with spear and knife; and like birds they vanish in a flash.

While bugles call out slaughter in this invaded land, the Buenos Aires government spreads propaganda directed toward those who have goods to lose. A leaflet signed by "The Friend of Order" calls Artigas a malevolent genie, apostle of the lie, ravenous wolf, scourge of his country, new Attila, disgrace of the century and affront to the human race.
Someone brings the leaflets to the camp. Artigas does not take his eyes off the fire: "My people don't know how to read," he says.

1818: Corrientes

Andresito

"Their rights come first," Artigas has said of the Indians; and they have suffered much death for being loyal to him.

Andrés Guacurari, Andresito, Guarani Indian, adopted son of Artigas, is the chief. He invaded Corrientes, a flood of men, a couple of months ago, arrows against rifles, and pulverized the allies of Buenos Aires.

Naked save for mud from the march and a rag or two, Andresito’s Indians entered the city. They brought along a few Indian children whom the Corrientes people had held as slaves. They met with silence and closed shutters. The commander of the garrison buried his fortune in his garden and the notary died of fright.

The Indians had not eaten for some time, but they took nothing and asked for nothing. As soon as they arrived they put on a theater show in homage to the principal families. Huge wings of silver paper spread on cane frames turned the Indians into guardian angels. For no one, because no one came, they staged "The Temptation of Saint Ignatius," an old pantomime of the Jesuit period.

"So they don’t want to come to Indian parties?" Andresito lit a big cigar, smoke emerging from his ears and eyes.

At dawn, drums beat to arms. At spear point Corrientes’s most respectable gentlemen are forced to cut the grass on the plaza and to sweep the streets till they are transparent. All day long the gentlemen are kept at this noble task and that night, in the theater, they deafen the Indians with applause.

Andresito governs Corrientes until Artigas sends for him.

The Indians are moving off down the road. They wear those enormous silver wings. Toward the horizon ride the angels. The sun makes them shine and gives them the shadows of eagles in flight.

1818: Paraná River

The Patriot Pirates

Andresito’s forces move down to Santa Fe, skirting the river. On the Paraná a flotilla of patriot pirates accompanies the Indians.

Canoes, launches, and a few well-armed brigantines make life impossible for the merchant ships of Brazil. Artigas’ tricolor sails on the rivers and the sea, everywhere, fighting. The pirates strip enemy ships in sudden boardings and take the fruits of their raids to the far Antilles.

Pedro Campbell is the admiral of this squadron of ships and small boats. He arrived here with the English invaders years ago, deserted, and took to galloping over the prairies. The Irish gaucho with hooped earrings and a fierce expression peering from beneath a mop of red hair soon becomes famous. When Artigas makes him chief of the pirates Campbell has already been slashed in Creole duels and credited with deaths but no treachery. Everyone knows that his silver knife is a snake that never bites in the back.

1818: San Fernando de Apure

War to the Death

At the head of an army pulverized by defeats rides Bolivar. A pilgrim’s hood shades his face; in the shadow, gleam eyes that devour as they look, and a melancholy smile.

Bolivar rides the horse of the late Rafael López. The saddle bears the silver initials of the dead man, a Spanish officer who took a shot at Bolivar while the patriot chief slept in a hammock.

The northern offensive has failed.

In San Fernando de Apure Bolivar reviews what remains of his forces.

"He’s crazy," think or murmur his barefoot, exhausted, injured soldiers as he announces that they will soon carry this sacred war, war to the death, into Colombia and Peru and to the peak of Potosí.
1819: Angostura

Abecedarium: The Constituent Assembly

Beneath the awning, on a ship sailing the Orinoco, Bolívar dictates to his secretaries his projected Constitution. He listens, corrects, and dictates it again in camp, while smoke from the fire defends him against mosquitos. Other ships bring deputies from Caracas, Barcelona, Cumaná, Barinas, Guyana, and Margarita Island. Suddenly, the winds of war have changed, perhaps in homage to Bolívar’s obstinacy, and in a flash half of Venezuela has fallen into the patriots’ hands.

The delegates to the congress disembark at the port of Angostura, town of little houses drawn by a child. On a toy press is printed here, week after week, El Correo del Orinoco. From the jungle this organ of republican thought spreads the articles of Creole doctors and announcements of the arrival of beer, penknives, harnesses, and volunteer soldiers from London.

Three salvoes salute Bolivar and his general staff. The birds take off, but a macaw swaggers indifferently with tough-guy strides.

The deputies mount the stone stairway.

Francisco Antonio Zea, major of Angostura, opens the session. His speech compares this patriot township with Memphis, Thebes, Alexandria, and Rome. The congress confirms Bolivar as head of the army and president with full powers. The cabinet is named.

Afterwards Bolivar takes the rostrum. Ignorant people, he warns, confuse reality with imagination and justice with vengeance... He expounds his ideas on the need to create Grand Colombia and lays the foundation of his projected Constitution, drawn up on the basis of the Englishmen’s Magna Carta.

1820: Boquerón Pass

Finale

The three great southern ports, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, and Montevideo, could not prevail against the rural hosts of José Artigas, chief of the interior. But death has had better luck and taken most of his people. In the bellies of birds of prey lie half the men of the eastern campaign. Andrésito lies dying in jail. Lavalleja and Campbell and others are prisoners, and a few have succumbed to treachery.

1821: Camp Laurelty

Saint Balthazar, Black King, Greatest Sage

From nearby towns and distant regions, Paraguayans flock to see these strange beings with skin like night.

Blacks are not known in Paraguay. The slaves Artigas has freed, put property at the mercy of despotism and anarchy. Francisco Ramírez of Entre Ríos proclaims that Artigas is the cause and origin of all the evils of South America, and Estanislao López in Santa Fe does a somersault as well.

Landowner chiefs make common cause with port merchants, as the leader of the revolution goes from disaster to disaster. The last of his Indians and blacks still follow him, as do a handful of ragged gauchos under the command of Andrés Latorre, last of his officers.

On the banks of the Paraná, Artigas chooses the best horseman. He gives him four thousand silver coins, all that remain, to take to the prisoners in Brazil.

Then he sticks his spear in the bank and crosses the river. Ruefully he marches off to Paraguay, into exile, this man who didn’t want America’s independence to be a trap for her poorest children.

You

Without turning your head, you bury yourself in exile. I see you, I am watching you: the Paraná slips by with the sluggishness of a lizard, and over there your flaming torn poncho fades into the distance at a horse’s trot and is lost in the foliage.

You don’t say goodbye to your land. She would not believe you. Or perhaps you still don’t know that you’re leaving for good.

The countryside turns gray. You are going, defeated, and your land is left breathless. The children to be born of her, the lovers who come to her, will they give her back her breath? Those who emerge from that land, those who enter it, will they prove themselves worthy of such deep sadness?

Your land. Our land of the south. You will be very necessary to her, Don José. Every time the greedy hurt her and humiliate her, every time that fools believe her dumb or sterile, she will miss you.

Because you, Don José Artigas, general of plain folk, are the best word she has spoken.
who have followed his tracks into exile, make a town in Laurelty.

With them is Balthazar, the black king chosen to welcome God
on earth. Invoking Saint Balthazar, they work the gardens, and for
him resound drums and war chants brought from Africa to the River
Plata plains. Artigas’s companions, the “Artigas-cuê,” put on red silk
capes and crowns of flowers when January Sixth comes around; and,
dancing, they ask the sage-king that slavery may never return, and
that he give them protection against bad spirits who soften heads,
and hens that crow like cocks.

1821: Carabobo

Páez

At fifteen he was born killing. He killed to defend himself; had to
flee to the mountains, and became a nomad horseman on the immense
prairies of Venezuela. Horseman leader of horsemen: José Antonio
Páez, Páez of the plains, flies at the head of the cowpoke artists of
spear and lasso, who ride bareback and charge like an avalanche. He
rides a white horse, because white horses ride better. When he is
not on a campaign, he learns to read and to play the cello.

The half-naked plainsmen, who in the times of Boves had served
Spain, defeat Spain at the battle of Carabobo. With machetes they
fight their way through the impossible brushland of the west, its
marshes and thickets, take the enemy by surprise, chew him up.

Bolívar names Páez commander-in-chief of the Venezuelan armed
forces. The plainsman enters Caracas by his side wearing, like him,
a garland of flowers.

In Venezuela, the die is cast.

1822: Guayaquil

San Martín

Appointment in Guayaquil. Between the Caribbean Sea and the Pa-
cific Ocean, an avenue of triumphal arches. General Bolívar appears
from the north. From the south comes José de San Martín, the general
who crossed the Andes cordillera in search of freedom for Chile and
Peru.

Bolívar talks and talks, offers and offers.
San Martín laconically cuts him short. “I am weary.” Bolívar
does not believe him; or perhaps is mistrustful because he still does
not know that glory also tires one out.

San Martín has spent thirty years in battle, from Oran to Maipú.
As a soldier he fought for Spain, as a hardened general for America.
For America, and never against her: when the Buenos Aires gov-
ernment sent him to smash the federal hosts of Artigas, San Martín
disobeyed and took his army into the mountains to continue his cam-
paign for the independence of Chile. Buenos Aires, which does not
give, now denies him bread and salt. In Lima they don’t like him
either. They call him King José.

Disappointment in Guayaquil. San Martín, great chess player,
evades the game.

“I am weary of commanding,” he says, but Bolívar hears other
words: You and I. Together, we don’t fit.

Later there is a banquet and ball. Bolívar dances in the center
of the room, the ladies competing for him. The noise makes San
Martín dizzy. After midnight, without saying goodbye, he leaves for
the docks. The baggage is already aboard the brigantine.

He gives the order to sail. He walks the deck, with slow steps,
accompanied by his dog and pursued by mosquitoes. The ship heads
away from the coast and San Martín turns to contemplate the land of
America which fades and fades.

1822: Buenos Aires

Songbird

At the edge of the village of Morón, a common grave swallows the
bones of a poet who until yesterday had a guitar and a name.

It’s better to travel light,
like an eagle and without sorrows ...

Bartolomé Hidalgo, troubadour of Artigas’s camps, lived only for
a moment, always in a whirlwind of songs and battles, and has died
in exile. The dogs of hunger chewed up his lungs. Through the streets
and squares of Buenos Aires wandered Hidalgo, hawking his couplets
which sing to free men and strip enemies bare. They afforded him
little food but much life. His unshrouded body ends up in the earth; the couplets, also naked, also plebeian, abide in the winds.

1822: Rio de Janeiro
Traffic Gone Mad

The Diario do Rio de Janeiro announces novelties just arrived from London: machines to repair streets or heal lungs or squeeze manioc; lathes and stills and steam cookers; eyeglasses, telescopes, razors, combs. Also padded saddles, silver stirrups, shiny harnesses and carriage lanterns.

Still seen in the streets are lone horsemen and a few old gilded palanquins from another age; but fashion dictates late-model English carriages that draw sparks from the cobblestones. The streets of Rio de Janeiro are dangerous. Speeding accidents multiply, and the power of the coachman grows.

White gloves, top hats: from high on their perches the coachmen let fall bullying glances on other black slaves, and enjoy sowing panic among pedestrians. They are famous drunkards and pimps and good guitar players; and they are indispensable in modern life. A carriage is worth a fortune when it is sold with a fast horse and a skillful black.

1822: Quito
Twelve Nymphs Stand Guard in the Main Plaza

and each one holds up a crown. Bands and fireworks explode and the tapping of horses’ hooves on the long stone streets sounds like the onset of rain. At the head of his army Bolivar enters Quito: a skinny gladiator, all nerve, his golden sword longer than his body. From the balconies rain down flowers and little embroidered kerchiefs. The balconies are altars upon which the ladies of Quito permit the erectness of their almost bare breasts to be worshipped amid lace and mantillas. Manuela Sáenz stands out like a dazzling ship’s figurehead. She drops a hand, and from the hand falls a crown of laurel. Bolivar raises his head and fastens his glance on her, a spear in slow motion.

That night, they dance. They waltz until they are giddy, and the world spins round and round to the rustle of that peerless woman’s thousand petticoats and the sweep of her long black hair.

1823: Lima
Swollen Hands from So Much Applauding

He rides from El Callao, between two files of soldiers, on a road of flowers. Lima receives General Bolivar with a hundred-gun salute, a hundred flags, a hundred speeches and hundred-cover banquets.

The Congress grants him full powers to throw out the Spaniards, who have retaken half of Peru. The Marquess of Torre Tagle presents him with a biography of Napoleon, a set of Toledo blades and bouquets of florid phrases: Victory awaits you on the icy peaks of the Andes to crown you with her laurels and the nymphs of the Rimac are already chanting hymns to celebrate your triumphs! The War Minister gives orders to the goddess Fortune: Take thy majestic flight from the foothills of Chimborazo to the peaks of our Andes and there await immortal Bolivar to crown his brow with the laurels of Peru!

The Rimac, the river that talks, is the only one that keeps quiet.

1824: Lima
In Spite of Everything

He rides from El Callao, between two files of soldiers, on a road of flowers. Lima receives the chief of the Spaniards, General Monet, hoisting and cheering the king’s flag. The flag flutters and speeches flutter. The Marquess of Torre Tagle melts with gratitude and implores Spain to save Peru from the menace of the accursed Bolivar, the Colombian monster.

Lima prefers to continue sleeping, amid rippling heraldry, the slumber of a colonial Arcadia. Viceroy, saints and cavaliers, crooks and coquettes exchange sighings and bowings amid the sandy wastes of America, beneath a sky that denies rain and sun but sends angels to defend the city walls. Inside them, one breathes the aroma of jasmine; outside, solitude and danger lie in wait. Inside, hand-kissings and processions and courtings: every officer imitates the king and
every monk the pope. In the palaces, stucco imitates marble; in the seventy churches of gold and silver, ritual imitates faith.

Far from Lima, Bolivar lies sick in the coast town of Pativilca. On all sides, he writes between fevers, I hear the sound of disaster... Everything is born into life and dies before my eyes, as if split by a bolt of lightning... Dust, ashes, nothing. All Peru, save for a few valleys, has fallen back into the hands of Spain. The independent governments of Buenos Aires and Chile have abandoned the cause of the freedom of this land; and not even the Peruvians themselves seem very interested.

"And now, what do you plan to do?" someone asks this battered and lonely man.

"Triumph," says Bolivar. (53, 202, and 302)

1824: Montevideo

City Chronicles from a Barber's Chair

No breeze tinkles the tin washbasin that hangs from a wire over a hole in the door to announce that here they shave beards, pull teeth, and apply suction cups.

Out of sheer habit, or to shake off the languors of summer, the Andalusian barber makes speeches or sings while he finishes covering a customer's face with foam. Between phrases and fandangos, the razor whispers. One of the barber's eyes watches the blade, which plows through the meringue; the other watches the Montevideans who plod along the dusty street. The tongue is sharper than the razor, and no one escapes its fleecing. The customer, prisoner as long as the shave lasts, dumb, immobile, listens to this chattering chronicle of customs and events and from time to time tries to follow, from the corner of an eye, the victims passing by.

A yoke of oxen hauling a dead woman to the cemetery. Behind the cart, a monk telling his beads. The sound of a bell bidding a routine farewell to the third-class deceased reaches into the shop. The razor pauses in the air. The barber crosses himself and from his mouth come words pronounced with a change of tone: "Poor little thing. She was never happy."

The corpse of Rosalía Villagrán is crossing the city occupied by Artigas's enemies. For a long time she had believed she was someone else, and believed she was living in another time and another world, and in the charity hospital she kissed the walls and talked to the pigeons. Rosalía Villagrán, Artigas's wife, has entered the gates of death without a cent to pay for her coffin. (315)

1824: Plain of Junín

The Silent Battle

Bolivar reorganizes his army, magic of his stubborn courage, and triumphs on the Peruvian plain of Junín. The world's best horsemen charge with sword and spear and wreak havoc. Not a shot is heard in the whole battle.

The American army is a mix of gauchos from the River Plata shores; Chilean peasants and plainmen from Grand Colombia, who fight with reins tied to their knees; Peruvian and Ecuadoran patriots, heroes of San Lorenzo and Maipú, Carabobo, and Pichincha. The men have spears from Guayaquil and ponchos from Cajamarca; the horses, saddles from Lambayeque and shoes from Trujillo. Also following Bolivar are Englishmen, Germans, Frenchmen, and even Spaniards won over by the New World, European veterans of distant wars on the Guadiana or the Rhine or the Seine.

As the sun dies, the lives of the wounded are sniffed out. Dying in Bolivar's tent is Lieutenant Colonel Sowersby, an Englishman who was with Napoleon at Borodino; and not far away a little dog howls beside the body of a Spanish officer. That dog kept running at the side of his friend's horse throughout the entire battle of Junín. Now General Miller tries to catch it or chase it off, but there is no way. (202)

1825: La Paz

Bolivia

The imperial standard falls in surrender at the feet of Antonio José de Sucre, general at twenty-three, grand marshal at thirty, Bolivar's favorite officer. The thunderous battle of the Ayacucho pampa finishes off Spanish power not just in Peru but on the whole continent.

When the news reaches Lima, Bolivar leaps onto the dining room
table and dances, stepping on plates and breaking glasses and bottles.

Later Bolívar and Sucre ride together beneath the triumphal arches of the city of La Paz. There, a country is born. Upper Peru, which had been absorbed into the viceregalies of Lima and Buenos Aires, now calls itself the Bolivarian Republic, and will be called Bolivia, so that its sons may perpetuate the name of their liberator.

José Mariano Ruylova, a monk with a great gift for oratory, a mouth full of gold, has prepared a splendid welcoming speech; but fate decrees that Ruylova shall die before Bolívar can hear it. The speech is composed in Greek.

1825: Potosí

Abecedarium: The Hero at the Peak

In Potosí, Bolívar climbs to the peak of the silver mountain. Bolívar speaks, History will speak: This mountain whose bosom is the wonder and envy of the world . . . The wind seizes the flags of the new fatherlands and the bells of all the churches. I think nothing of this opulence when I compare it . . . Bolívar’s arms embrace a thousand leagues. The valleys multiply the salvos of the guns and the echo of the words . . . with the glory of having brought to victory the standard of liberty from the burning and distant beaches . . . History will speak of the great man up on the heights. It will say nothing of the thousand wrinkles lining the face of this man, still unworn by years but deeply furrowed by loves and sorrows. History will not be concerned with the galloping colts in his breast when, from the skies of Potosí, he embraces the land as if it were a woman. The land as if it were that woman: the one who sharpens his swords; and strips him and forgives him with a glance. The one who knows how to listen to him beneath the thunder of guns and the speeches and ovations, when he says: You will be alone, Manuela. And I will be alone, in the middle of the world. There will be no more consolation than the glory of having conquered ourselves.

1825: Potosí

England Is Owed a Potosí

The Spanish colonies that are born to independent life walk bent over. From the first day they drag a heavy stone hung from the neck, a stone that grows and overwhelms. The English debt, born of Britain’s support in arms and soldiers, is multiplied by the grace of usurers and merchants. The moneylenders and their intermediaries, versed in the arts of alchemy, turn any old cobblestone into a golden jewel; and British traders find in these lands their most lucrative markets. The new countries, fearful of Spanish reconquest, need official recognition by England; but England recognizes no one without first signing a Treaty of Friendship and Commerce which assures freedom of invasion for its industrial merchandise.

I abhor the debts more than the Spaniards, writes Bolívar to the Colombian general Santander, and tells him that to pay those debts he has sold the Potosí mines to the English for two and a half million pesos. Furthermore, he writes, I have indicated to the government of Peru that it should sell to England all of its mines, all of its lands and properties and all the other holdings of the government, for its national debt, which is not less than twenty million.

The Rich Mountain of Potosí, down in the world, now belongs to a London firm, the phantom Potosí, La Paz, and Peruvian Mining Association. As happens with other delusions born of speculative fevers, the name is longer than the capital: the firm claims a million pounds sterling, but actually has fifty thousand.

The Curse of the Silver Mountain

Potosí, which has yielded so much silver, is yielding little. The mountain does not want to.

For more than two centuries, Potosí heard Indians groaning in her entrails. The Indians, condemned to the tunnels, implored her to exhaust her seams. And finally the mountain cursed greed.

Since then, mysterious mule caravans have been arriving by night, diving into the mountain and secretly carrying off loads of silver. No one can see them, no one can catch them; but somehow the mountain keeps emptying herself night by night.
When a mule breaks a leg because the ore makes too heavy a load, the dawn rises upon a beetle limping painfully down the road. (247)

1826: Chuquisaca

Bolívar and the Indians

The laws in Spain's American colonies were never obeyed. Good or bad, the laws never existed in reality—neither the many royal warrants which protected the Indians (and which confessed their own impotence through repetition), nor the ordinances that banned the circulation of Jews and novels. This tradition does not keep eminent Creoles, generals, or doctors, from believing that the Constitution is an infallible potion for public happiness.

Simón Bolívar weaves constitutions with fervor. Now he presents to the Congress a constitutional project for the new republic bearing his name. According to the text, Bolivia will have a president-for-life and three legislative chambers—tribunes, senators, and censors—which have some resemblance, says Bolívar, to the Areopagus of Athens and the censors of Rome.

People who cannot read will not have the right to vote; and since almost all Bolivians speak Quechua or Aymara, know nothing of the Castilian language, and cannot read, only a handful of select males will have that right. As in Colombia and Peru, Bolivar has decreed in the new country the abolition of native tribute and of forced labor for Indians; and has arranged to divide communal lands into private plots. And, so that the Indians, the country's immense majority, may receive the European light of Civilization, Bolívar has brought to Chuquisaca his old teacher, Simón Rodríguez, with orders to establish schools. (42 and 172)

1826: Chuquisaca

Cursed Be the Creative Imagination

Simón Rodríguez, Bolívar's teacher, has returned to America. For a quarter of a century Simón was on the other side of the sea. There, he was a friend of the socialists of Paris, London, and Geneva; he worked with the printers of Rome, the chemists of Vienna, and even taught elementary lessons in a small town on the Russian steppe.

After the long embrace of welcome, Bolívar names him director of education in the newly founded country. With a model school in Chuquisaca, Simón Rodríguez begins the task of uprooting the lies and fears hallowed by tradition. Pious ladies scream, learned doctors howl, dogs bark at the scandal. Horror: the madman Rodríguez proposes to mix children of high birth with mestizos who until last night slept in the streets. What is he thinking of? Does he want the orphans to take him to heaven? Or does he corrupt them so they'll accompany him to hell? In the classrooms, neither catechism nor sacrilege Latin, nor rules of grammar are heard, only a racket of saws and hammers unbearable to the ears of monks and pettyfoggers schooled in the repulsiveness of manual work. A school for whores and thieves! Those who believe the body is shameful and woman an adornment, cry to high heaven. In Don Simón's school, boys and girls sit jammed side by side; and to top it all, their studying is playing.

The prefect of Chuquisaca heads the campaign against the satyr who has come to corrupt the morals of youth. Soon, Marshal Sucre, president of Bolivia, demands Simón Rodríguez's resignation, because he has not presented his accounts with due meticulousness. (296 and 298)

The Ideas of Simón Rodríguez:
Teaching How to Think

The author is considered mad. Let him transmit his ravings to the fathers yet to be born.

Everyone must be educated without distinction of race or color. Let us not deceive ourselves: without popular education, there will be no true society.

Instruction is not education. Teach, and you will have people who know; educate, and you will have people who do.

To order recital from memory of what is not understood, is to make parrots. Do not in any case order a child to do anything that has no "why" at the foot of it. If you accustom the child always to see reason behind the orders he receives, he misses it when he does not see it, and asks for it, saying, "Why?" Teach the children to be
who goes about in a four-horse carriage, claims to be president of a
country he does not know and despises. Beyond the city walls of
Buenos Aires, that country hates him.

(55, 271, and 342)

1826: Panama
Lonely Countries

The infant said its first words. They were its last. Of those invited to
the baptism, only four reached Panama, and instead of a baptism
there was extreme unction. Grief, father’s grief, shrinks the face of
Bolivar. The condolences sound hollow.

Bells ring out for the unity of Hispanic America.

Bolivar had called on the new countries to unite, under British
protection, in one fatherland. He did not invite the United States or
Haiti, because they are foreign to our American ways; but he wanted
Great Britain to integrate the Hispanic American league, to defend
it from the danger of Spanish reconquest.

London has no interest in the unity of its new dominions. The
Congress of Panama has given birth to nothing but edifying declara-
tions, because the old vicerealties have birthed countries tied to
a new empire overseas, and divorced among themselves. The colonial
economy, mines and plantations producing for abroad, cities that
prefer the bazaar to the factory, opens the way not for a great nation
but for a great archipelago. The independent countries are disinteg-
ating while Bolívar dreams of a unified fatherland. They have not
signed a single trade agreement among themselves, but are flooded
with European merchandise and almost all have bought the chief
British export product, the doctrine of free trade.

In London, Prime Minister George Canning exhibits his trophy
before the House of Commons.

(202 and 207)

1826: London
Canning

The pearl of the crown speaks. Plebeian George Canning, chief of
British diplomacy, consecrates his work before the House of Com-
mons. Canning spreads out his arms, his falcon wings: “I called the
New World into existence,” proclaims the architect of empire, “to redress the balance of the Old.”

From a corner comes a mocking giggle. A long silence follows. Canning rears up in the darkness his sharp ghost’s profile and then the greatest ovation ever heard in this chamber explodes.

England is the axis of the planet. Lord Castlereagh had done much for the imperial project until one evening, overwhelmed, he slit his throat with a razor. Hardly had Castlereagh’s successor, Canning, come to power when he announced that the knightly era had been left behind. Military glories should give way to astute diplomacy. Smugglers had done more for England than generals; and the time had come for merchants and bankers to win the real battles for world domination.

The patience of the cat is more effective than the fury of the tiger.

(171 and 280)

1828: Bogotá
Here They Hate Her

Without lowering their voices they call her “outsider” and “Messalina,” and in secret they give her worse names. They say that on her account Bolivar goes about loaded with shadows and riddled with wrinkles, and that he is burning up his talents in bed.

Manuela Sáenz has fought with a spear in Ayacucho. The mustachios she tore from an enemy were a talisman of the patriot army. When the troops in Lima mutinied against Bolivar, she disguised herself as a man and went through the barracks with a pistol and a bag of money. Here, in Bogotá, she strolls in the shade of the cherry trees, dressed as a captain and escorted by two black women in hussar uniforms. A few nights ago, at a party, she put against the wall a rag doll labeled “Death to Francisco de Paula Santander, Traitor,” and shot it.

Santander has grown in the shadow of Bolivar. During the war years it was Bolivar who named him vice president. Now, Santander would like to assassinate the king without a crown at some masked ball or in treacherous ambush.

The night watchman of Bogotá, lamp in hand, says the last word. He is answered by the church bells, which scare the Devil and call all to go home.

Shots ring out, guards fall. The assassins burst up the stairs. Thanks to Manuela, who lies to put them off, Bolivar manages to escape out the window.

(53, 202, and 295)

1828: Bogotá
From Manuela Sáenz’s Letter to Her Husband James Thorne

No, no, not again, man, for God’s sake! Why do you make me write, breaking my resolution? Look, what good are you doing, only giving me the pain of telling you a thousand times no? Mister, you are excellent, you are inimitable. I will never say anything else about you. But, my friend, leaving you for General Bolivar is something. Leaving another husband without your qualities would be nothing.

... I know very well that nothing can unite me to him under the auspices of what you call honor. Do you think me less honorable for having him as my lover and not my husband? Oh, I don’t live by the social concerns invented for mutual torture!

Leave me alone, my dear Englishman. Let’s do something else. In heaven we’ll be married again, but on earth, no... There, everything will be English style, because a life of monotony is reserved for your nation (in love, I mean, because in other ways... who are cleverer in trade and navies?). They take love without pleasure, conversation without humor, and walks without vigor; they greet with bows and curtseys, get up and sit down with caution, joke without laughing. These are divine formalities; but I, wretched mortal, who laugh at myself, at you, and at these English solemnities, how badly I would do in heaven!...

(238)

1829: Corrientes
Bonpland

He discovered America in the course of nine thousand leagues and seventy thousand little plants. When he returned to Paris, he missed America. His nostalgia made it clear to him that he belonged to the same land as the roots and flowers he had collected. That land called
him as Europe had never called him; and for it he crossed the ocean again.

He was a professor in Buenos Aires and a laborer in the maté fields of the upper Paraná. There, the soldiers of Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia, Supreme and Lifetime Dictator of Paraguay, came upon him. They beat him with sticks and took him upriver in a canoe.

For nine years he has been imprisoned in Paraguay. Dictator Francia, who rules by terror and mystery, is said to have said it was for spying. Kings, emperors, and presidents intercede for the freedom of the famous sage; but neither mediations nor missions, entreaties nor threats have any effect.

The dictator condemned him on a day of north wind, the wind that turns the soul sour. One day of south wind, he decides to free him. Since Bonpland doesn’t want to leave, the dictator expels him.

Bonpland has not been shut up in a cell. He was working lands that yielded cotton, sugarcane, and oranges, and has created a rum distillery, a carpentry shop, and a hospital; he attended the deliveries of women and cows throughout the region and gave out infallible concoctions against rheumatism and fever. Paraguay loved its bare-foot prisoner with the oversized shirt, seeker of rare plants, man of bad luck who gave so much good; and now he leaves because soldiers take him out by force.

No sooner does he cross the frontier into Argentine territory than someone steals his horses.

and keeps watch. The dictator lives alone, and alone eats the bread and salt of his land in dishes previously sampled by dogs.

All Paraguayans are spies or spied upon. Very early in the morning, while sharpening his razor, Alejandro the barber gives El Supremo the first report of the day on rumors and conspiracies. After nightfall the dictator hunts stars with his telescope; and they too tell him what his enemies are plotting.

(82 and 281)

1829: Rio de Janeiro

The Snowball of External Debt

It has been seven years since Prince Pedro proclaimed himself emperor of Brazil. The country was born into independent life knocking at the doors of English bankers. King Juan, Pedro’s father, had stripped the bank bare and taken with him to Lisbon the last grams of gold and silver. The first millions of pounds sterling soon arrived from London. The customs income was mortgaged as a guarantee, and native intermediaries got two percent of every loan.

Now Brazil owes double what it received and the debt rolls on, growing like a snowball. The creditors give the orders; and every Brazilian is born in debt.

In a solemn speech Emperor Pedro reveals that the public treasury is exhausted, in a miserable state, and that total ruin threatens the country. However, he announces salvation: the emperor has decided to take measures which will destroy the cause of the existing calamity at one blow. And he explains what those radical measures are: they consist of new loans that Brazil expects to receive from the houses of Rothschild and Wilson in London, with stiff but honorable interest.

Meanwhile, the newspapers report that a thousand fiestas are being prepared to celebrate the emperor’s wedding to Princess Amelia. The advertisements in the papers offer black slaves for sale or hire, cheeses and pianos newly arrived from Europe, English jackets of fine woolens, and Bordeaux wines. The Hotel do Globo on Quitanda Street seeks a white, foreign chef who is not a drunkard or a puffer of cigars, and at 76 Duvidor Street they need a lady who speaks French to look after a blind person.

(186 and 275)
1830: Magdalena River

The Boat Goes Down to the Sea

Green land, black land. In the far distance mist shrouds the mountains. The Magdalena is carrying Simón Bolívar downstream.

"No."

In the streets of Lima, the same people who gave him a diamond-studded sword are burning his Constitution. Those who called him "Father of the Country" are burning his effigy in the streets of Bogotá. In Caracas, they officially dub him "enemy of Venezuela." Over in Paris, the defamatory articles about him get stronger; and the friends who know how to praise him do not know how to defend him.

"I cannot."

Was this the history of mankind? This labyrinth, this futile game of shadows? The Venezuelan people curse the wars that have taken half their sons to remote areas and given them nothing for it. Venezuela tears itself loose from Grand Colombia and Ecuador follows suit, while Bolívar lies beneath a dirty canvas in the boat that sails down the Magdalena to the sea.

"I can no more."

Blacks are still slaves in Venezuela, despite the laws. In Colombia and Peru, the laws passed to civilize Indians are applied to destroy them. The tribute, the colonial tax that Indians pay for being Indians, has been reimposed in Bolivia.

Was this, was this history? All grandeur ends up dwarfed. On the neck of every promise crawls betrayal. Great men become voracious landlords. The sons of America destroy each other. Sucre, the chosen inheritor, who had saved himself from poison and dagger, falls in the forests on the way to Quito, toppled by a bullet.

"I can no more. Let us go."

Crocodiles and timber interweave in the river. Bolívar, yellow-skinned, no light in his eyes, shivering, delirious, moves down the Magdalena toward the sea, toward death.

(53 and 202)

1830: Maracaibo

The Governor Proclaims:

... Bolivar, genius of evil, torch of anarchy, oppressor of his country, has ceased to exist.

(202)

1830: La Guaira

Divide et Impera

The North American consul in La Guaira, J. G. Williamson, prophet and protagonist of the disintegration of Grand Colombia, sent the State Department a well-informed report. A month ahead of the event, he announced the separation of Venezuela and the end of the customs duties that do not suit the United States.

Simón Bolívar dies on December Seventeenth. On another December Seventeenth, eleven years ago, he had founded Grand Colombia, a fusion of Colombia and Venezuela which later also embraced Ecuador and Panama. Grand Colombia has died with him.

The North American consul in Lima, William Tudor, has helped to weave the conspiracy against the American project of Bolivar, the dangerous madman of Colombia. Tudor was upset not only by Bolívar's fight against slavery, a bad example for the southern United States, but also and above all by the excessive aggrandizement of the America liberated from Spain. With all logic at his command, the consul has said that England and the United States have common and potent reasons of State against the development of a new power. The British Admiral Fleming, meanwhile, comes and goes between Valencia and Cartagena encouraging the division.

(207 and 280)

1830: Montevideo

Abecedarium: The Oath of the Constitution

The English government, Lord John Ponsouby had said, will never consent that only two states, Brazil and Argentina, should be exclusive masters of the east coasts of South America.

Through London's influence, and under its protection, Uruguay
becomes an independent state. The most rebellious province of the River Plata, which has expelled the Brazilians from its soil, breaks off from the old trunk and takes on a life of its own. The port of Buenos Aires is free at last from the nightmare of this unfriendly prairie where Artigas rose in rebellion.

In the Mother church of Montevideo, Father Larrañaga offers a thanksgiving chant to God. Fervor illuminates the face of the priest, as in that other Te Deum he celebrated some years back, from the same pulpit, in homage to the invaders from Brazil.

The Constitution is sworn beneath the City Hall balconies. The ladies, who do not exist in the laws, accompany the juridical consecration of the new country as if it involved them. With one hand they clutch their gigantic hairdos, dangerous on windy days, and with the other hold open against their breasts fans painted with patriotic themes. High starched collars keep the gentlemen from turning their heads. The Magna Carta resounds through the plaza, clause after clause, over a sea of top hats. According to the Constitution of the new republic, there will be no citizenship for the men who offered their bodies against the bullets of Spain, Buenos Aires, and Brazil. Uruguay is not being made for poor gauchos, or Indians, or blacks, who still don’t know that a law has freed them. Not permitted to vote or hold public office, says the Constitution, are servants, peons, rank-and-file soldiers, vagrants, drunkards, and illiterates.

At nightfall the Coliseum is packed. It is opening night for The Happy Deceit; or, The Triumph of Innocence, by Rossini, the first complete opera sung in this city.

1830: Montevideo
Fatherland or Grave

The first bard of the Uruguayan Parnassus, Francisco Acuña de Figueroa, began his career with an ode, in eight-line stanzas, to the military glory of Spain. When Artigas’s gauchos took Montevideo, he fled to Rio de Janeiro. There, he dedicated his adulatory rhymes to the Portuguese prince and all of his court. Still shouldering his lyre, Don Francisco followed the Brazilian invaders back to Montevideo and rhapsodized over the occupying troops. Years later, on the day following the ouster of the Brazilians, the muses breathed patriotic decasyllables into Don Francisco’s ear, words of laurel to crown the brows of the heroes of independence; and now the reptilian poet writes the national anthem of the newborn country. We Uruguayans will be forever condemned to listen to his verses standing up.

1832: Santiago de Chile
National Industry

In Chile, too, gentlemen dance and dress in French styles, imitate Byron in knotting their ties, and, at table, obey the dictates of French chefs; à la English they take tea, and à la French they down their wine.

When Vicente Pérez Rosales set up his brandy factory, he bought the best stills in Paris and a great quantity of labels with gilded arabesques and fine lettering that said in English: Old Champagne Cognac. On the door of his office he had a big sign painted:

DIRECT IMPORTATION

The taste would not be too-too, but it was nearly-nearly, and no one got stomach ulcers. The business went like a house on fire. The factory could not keep up with the demand, but Don Vicente came down with an attack of patriotism and decided he could not go on living in a state of treason.

“This good reputation belongs only to Chile.”

He threw the European labels in the fire and had another sign put on his door, this time even larger:

NATIONAL INDUSTRY

The bottles now wear a new dress: labels printed here, which say in Spanish: Chilean Cognac.

Not even one can be sold.