

Appendix I Our America

The presumptuous villager will believe that the entire world is his village, and that as long as he remains as the mayor, as long as he is free to coerce his rival into letting go of his sweetheart, as long as his savings are growing in the piggy bank, then he can accept universal order as a given, unaware of the existence of giants that travel seven leagues in one step, likely to plant their boot squarely atop him; nor does he know aught of the clash of comets in the sky, which hurtle through the air engulfing whole worlds asleep.¹ What remains of the village in America must awaken. These days are not for sleeping with a handkerchief on one's head, but rather, with weapons as a pillow (like the illustrious gentlemen in Juan de Castellanos)²—weapons of judgment, which will prevail over others. Trenches of ideas, worth more than trenches of stone.

There is no prow capable of slashing through a cloud of ideas. An energetic idea, blazing up in its proper time in this world will stop when faced with a squadron of armor-plated soldiers, like the mystical flag of the Last Judgment. The peoples as yet unfamiliar with each other must make haste to be known, as would those who join forces in combat. Those who taught one another the right of force, like jealous brothers claiming the same land, or like the owner of a small house who envies the owner of a greater one, must be fitted together, the way two hands conjoin to form one. If those who under the protection of a criminal tradition, would tear the land asunder and wrest it from the defeated brother—the brother still being punished for his faults—with a saber stained with the blood of their own veins, if they do not want to be called a criminal people, let them return these lands to their brother. No debtor redeems a debt of honor in money, or by slapping someone on the face. And we can no longer be a people of leaves, who live in the air, our crown brimming with blooms, crackling or whirling about, depending on the caprice of the light's caress, or whether the tempests thrash the tree about and overturn it. Trees must form ranks lest the seven-league giant stride on! It is the hour of retribution, of the united march, and we must go forward in close formation, like silver in the roots of the Andes.

Only the seven-monthers lack courage. Those who have no faith in their land are seven-month men: because they are lacking in courage, they deny it to the rest. The difficult tree cannot be reached by the puny arm, the braceleted arm with painted nails, the arm of Madrid or Paris; and they will say that the tree cannot be reached at all. These harmful insects who eat away at the bone of the native land that nurtures them ought to be loaded onto barges. If they are Parisians or Madrileños, let them go

to the Prado, streetlamps and all, or to the Tortoni [cafe], sorbets and all. These carpenter's children who are ashamed that their father was a carpenter! Those born in America who are ashamed because they wear the apron of the *indio*, of the mother who reared them; those who disown their sick mother—scoundrels!—and leave her abandoned on her sickbed! What, then, is a real man? The one who stays with his mother, to cure her of her illness, or the one who puts her to work where no one will see her, living at her expense on rotted lands with a worm for a necktie, cursing the breast that bore him, displaying the written sign of treachery on the back of his paper jacket? These children of our America, who must be saved along with her Indians; America, which must expand from few to many; and these deserters who ask to fight in the North American armies, who drown their Indians in blood, diminishing the many to a few! These sissies, men, and yet they are unwilling to do the work of men! Look at Washington, who made this land: did he run away to live with the English, to live with the English in the years when he saw them go against his own land? These "*incroyables*" who drag their honor about a foreign land, like the *incroyables* of the French Revolution,³ dancing and licking their lips, dragging their "rr"s!

In what other native land can a man possess more pride than in our sorrowful American republics, raised from among the mute Indian masses, to the noise of combat between the book and the altar candle [*cirial*],⁴ over the bloody arms of a hundred apostles? Out of such disparate factors, never in any lesser historical period have more progressive and compact nations been born. The haughty man believes that the land was made to serve as his pedestal, because he has a quill or colorful words at his disposal; and he attacks his native republic as helpless and hopeless because its forests offer him no new way of gallivanting around the world, steering Persian ponies and spilling champagne. The fault does not lie with the newborn country, but with those who try to rule originary peoples, composed of a singular and violent nature, with laws inherited from four centuries of freedom in the United States and nineteen centuries of monarchy in France. No decree of Hamilton's⁵ could stop the heaving breast of the plainsman's steed. No pronouncement by Sieyès⁶ could liberate the clotted blood of the Indian. To govern well, attention must be directed toward what actually exists, there in the place that one governs; and the good governor in America is not he who knows how to govern in Germany or France, but he who knows the elements that constitute his country, who can bring them together to reach that suitable state (through the methods and institutions born of that selfsame country) wherein every man knows and exercises his capabilities, wherein all may enjoy the abundance that nature has placed for all in the community [*pueblo*], conceived with their labor and defended with their lives. The government must be born from the country. The spirit of governance must be that of the country. The form of government must arise from out of that country's constitution itself. Governance is nothing more than the equilibrium of a country's natural elements.

Thus, has the imported book been vanquished by natural man in America. Natural man has vanquished the artificial men of letters [*letrados*]. The autochthonous

mestizo has vanquished the exotic Creole. There is no battle between civilization and barbarism, but between false erudition and nature. Natural man is good, and he obeys and rewards a superior intelligence; and yet the latter does not obtain his permission to wound him, or offend him by ignoring him—an unpardonable thing for natural man, ready to recover by force the respect of anyone who has wounded him with suspicion or prejudged his interest. It is through this conformity to the disregarded elements of nature that the tyrants of America have risen to power, and through their betrayal of them that they have fallen. Through these tyrannies, the republics have purged their inability to know the true elements of the country, to derive from these elements the form of government and governance in accordance with them. Governance, in a new nation, means creation.

If, in peoples composed of both cultured and uncultured elements, the cultured have not learned the art of governance, then the uncultured will govern, through their habit of attacking and resolving doubts with their hands. The uncultured masses are lazy, and timid in matters of the intellect, and they want to be well-governed; but if the government aggrieves them, they will shake it off and govern themselves. How will these heads of state come out of universities, if there is no university in America that teaches the rudiments in the art of governance, or the analysis of the specific elements of the American peoples? The youth come out into the world to make predictions with their Yankee or French "specs," and they aspire to lead a people whom they do not know. Those who are ignorant of the rudiments of politics must be denied entrance into the political profession. Contest prizes must not be given to the best song of praise, but to a close study of those factors at work within one's country. In the newspaper, the church, and the academe, the study of real factors affecting the country ought to be promoted. It is enough to know them, without bandages or hesitation, because anyone who sets aside a part of the truth, either willfully or by forgetfulness, will in the end fall prey to the same truth that he has omitted, that grows in negligence and overthrows anything raised in the name of truth, without it. Resolving the problem after knowing its elements is far easier than resolving the problem without knowing them. Along comes the natural man, indignant and strong, to overturn the justice accumulated in books, because it has not been administered in accordance with the patent necessities of the country. To know, then, is to resolve. To know the country and to govern it in accordance with this understanding is the only way of liberating it from tyranny. The European university must give way to the American university. The history of America, from the Incas to the present, must be taught hands-on; even at the expense of the archons of Greece. Our Greece is preferable to the Greece that is not ours. Ours is more necessary. National politicians must replace the exotic ones. Let the world be grafted onto our republics, but the trunk must be our own. And silence the vanquished pedant; for there is no native land of which a man can be more proud than our sorrowful American republics.

With our feet in the rosary, our heads white, and our bodies mottled in Indian and Creole, we came, naked into the world of nations. With the banner of the Virgin, we

sallied forth for the conquest of liberty. A priest, a few lieutenants, and one woman⁷ raised the Republic in Mexico on the shoulders of the Indians. A Spanish canon, in the shadow of his cape, taught the principles of French liberty to a handful of magnificent students who later made a general of Spain into a leader in Central America—against Spain.⁸ With monarchical habits and the sun for a heart, Venezuelans from the North and Argentines from the South led the people up in arms. When the heroes of both clashed and the continent was about to tremble, one—by no means the lesser—pulled back his reins. And because heroism in a time of peace is rarer, less glorious, than in a time of war; because it is easier for a man to die with honor than it is to think methodically; because governing with exalted and unanimous sentiments is more immediately feasible than leading the multiple, arrogant, exotic, or ambitious ideas that arise after a battle; because the powers overwhelmed by the epic onslaught gawked, with the feline wariness of the species and the weight of the real, at the building where it had hoisted the flag of these peoples—nourished by shrewdness in governance through the continuous practice of reason and liberty—on the coarse and singular regions of our mestiza America, among these peoples of bare knees and Parisian jackets; because the hierarchic constitution of the colonies resisted the democratic organization of the republic; because the chief ministers in bowties left their field riding boots in the hallway; or because the bookish Redeemers did not understand that the revolution that did triumph with the soul of the land, unleashed from the voice of the savior, had to govern with the soul of the land, and not against or without it—America began to suffer, and suffers, from the fatigue of having to accommodate discordant and hostile elements, which it inherited from a despotic and wicked colonizer, from imported ideas and forms that have proven utterly retarded in matters of logical government, given their lack of local reality. Only by unacknowledging or ignoring the fools who had helped to ransom it, the continent—dislocated for three centuries by a leadership that denied man's right to the exercise of his reason, entered into a government that had reason as its base: the reason of all in matters concerning all, and not the university-bred reason of one over the provincial reason of the others. The problem of independence did not entail a change of forms, but the change of spirit.

A common cause had to be made with the oppressed to consolidate the system opposed to the interests and customs of the rule of the oppressors. But the tiger, however frightened by the explosion, returned at night to the site of his prey. True, it is dying with fire blazing in his eyes and his claws in the air. Yet no one heard him come, because he came with his claws in velvet. By the time his prey had awakened, the tiger was already on it. Thus did the colony persevere in the heart of the republic, but our America begins to overcome her great errors—the arrogance of her chief cities, the blind triumph of the disdainful peasants, the excessive importation of foreign ideas and formulas, the iniquitous and impolitic scorn for the aborigine race—through the higher virtue, fertilized [*abonada*] with the necessary blood, of the republic underneath, still fighting against the colony. The tiger waits behind every tree, huddled behind every corner. But it is dying, with its claws in the air, fire blazing in his eyes.

But “These countries will be saved,” as Rivadavia⁹ said; Rivadavia, the Argentine who suffered from excessive refinement in unrefined times. The machete cannot be sheathed in silk; after all, can one ever be rid of the lance if it is by the lance that a country has been won? For the country becomes angry, and would demand at the very door of Iturbide's Congress “make the fair-haired one (Iturbide) an emperor!”¹⁰ These countries will be saved, because with the prevailing temper of moderation, the serene harmony of nature in a continent of light, and the influx of critical readings, which in Europe have succeeded the readings of trial and error and fallaciousness under which the previous generation was steeped, there is now being born in America, in this epoch, the real man.

We were a vision, with an athlete's breast, a dandy's hands, and a child's brow. We were a mask, dressed in breeches from England, a Parisian vest, a jacket from North America, and a bicorne from Spain. The Indian, mute, walked slowly around us, and went off to the mountain, to the summit of the mountain to baptize his children. At night, the scorned Negro sang in the music of his heart, alone and unknown, amid the waves and wild animals. The peasant, a creator, blind with indignation, turned on and against the disdainful city, against his own creation. We were all epaulettes and togas, in countries that came into the world with rope sandals on their feet and the *vincha*¹¹ on their heads. The general temper should have been to fraternize, with charity in our hearts and the audacity of builders, the *vincha* and the toga; to free the Indian, to clear up sufficient space for the Negro, to adjust liberty to the body of those who rose up and triumphantly fought for it. We were left with the bureaucrat, a general, the lettered man, and a prebendary. The cherubic youth, with arms like those of an octopus, threw its head into the sky, let it fall with a sterile glory, crowned with clouds. The native people, urged on by instinct and blind with triumph, destroyed the golden batons. Neither the European nor the Yankee book was able to offer the key to the Spanish-American enigma. They tried to use hate, and these countries took a turn for the worse. Tired of useless hate, of the resistance of the book against the lance, reason against the altar candle [*círial*], the city against the countryside, the impossible empire of divided urban castes over the native nation, by turns tempestuous or inert, they unknowingly began to try love. People stand up on their feet and salute themselves. “What exactly are we?” they ask, and they tell one another what they are like. When a problem emerged in Cojimar, no one sought for a solution in Danzig.¹² The frock coats were still from France, but the thought now began to come from America. The youths of America roll up the sleeves of their shirts, sink their hands in the mass and make it rise with the yeast of their sweat. They understand that we have imitated for too long and that salvation is in creating. *Crear* is the password of a generation. If our wine is made from bananas; and if its taste turns out bitter, it is still our wine! It is known that the forms of a country's government must be accommodated to the country's natural elements; that lest there be an error of form, the form of absolute ideas must be made relative; that in order for liberty to be viable, it must be sincere and abundant; that if the republic does not open its arms to all and move forward with all, the republic will die. The tiger within will enter through the cracks, and so will the tiger

from without. The general will subject the march of the cavalry to an infant's pace. Or with the matter of defense left to the infants, the enemy will envelop the cavalry. Politics is strategy. The people must live by being critical of one another, because criticism is the health of nations [pueblos]—but with one heart and one mind. Stoop down and reach toward the unfortunate, raise them up in the arms of the people! With the fire of the heart melt a frozen America! Let the native blood of the country run, roaring and coursing wildly through America's veins! Standing tall, from one country to another, these new American men will salute one another with the joyful eyes of workers. Natural statesmen will emerge from the direct study of nature. They will read in order to apply, but not to copy. The economists will study every difficulty at the root of its origins. The orators will begin to sober up. The playwrights will bring native characters onto the scene. The academies will discuss practical matters. Poetry will make a clean break with the Zorrillesque¹³ damsel of long flowing hair, and hang its red waistcoat on the glorious tree. The heads of state in the Indian republics will learn Indian.

From every danger America is being saved. Over the heads of some republics the octopus is still asleep. Others, by the law of equilibrium, have risen from the sea, to reclaim the lost centuries with a mad and sublime urgency. Others, who have forgotten that Juárez¹⁴ once went about in a coach drawn by mules, hitch their carriages to the wind, with a soap bubble as their coachman; for poisonous luxury, the enemy of freedom, corrupts the lascivious man and opens the door to the foreigner. Others revise and refine the meaning of virility with the epic spirit of a threatened independence in mind. Others, in the rapacious war against their neighbor, create an army of thugs capable of turning against and devouring them. But another danger perhaps runs throughout our America, which does not come from America itself, but rather the difference in origins, methods, and interests between the two continental factions, and the hour is drawing near when an imperious and driven people who are ignorant of our America and who disdain it, will advance, demanding intimate relations. And because the virile nations, which have emerged of their own efforts, with shotgun and the law, love and love alone only other virile nations; because the hour of abandonment and ambition—perhaps urged on by the more pure-blooded North Americans, perhaps brought about by the vindictive and sordid masses, or by the tradition of conquest and the interests of a skillful leader—this hour is not so close at hand to those of us who look on in horror, that we have not the opportunity to prove our continuous and discrete pride, capable of confronting it and turning it away; because North America's republican image before the attentive nations of the Universe, places a barrier against it that must not be broken by any impulsive provocation or ostentatious arrogance, any parricidal discord in our America—the pressing obligation of our America is to present itself as it is, one soul and one intent, fleet-footed champion over a suffocating past, stained only with the redemptive blood drawn from our hands in our battle with ruins, only with the blood of our veins left open by our former masters. The disdain of the formidable neighbor, who does not know our America, is the greatest danger confronting her; and it is crucial in these approaching days of their

encounter for the neighbor to know her, and know her soon, lest it scorn her. Out of ignorance, it may come, perhaps, to instill in her greed. Out of respect, after it comes to know her, it may take her hands away. One must have faith in what is best in man, and to distrust what is worst. One must give an opportunity for the best to reveal itself and prevail over the worst. If not, the worst will prevail. Nations [pueblos] must have one pillory for anyone who incites them to useless hate, and another pillory for anyone who does not tell them the truth in time.

There is no hate among races, because there are no races. Narrow-minded thinkers, thinkers by lamplight, stir up and string together races, which the discerning traveler and the cordial observer will find only in the bookstore, not in the justice of Nature, where the universal identity of man stands out against the background of his victorious love and turbulent appetite. The soul, eternal and in every sense the same, emanates from diverse bodies in form and color. It is a sin against Humanity to foment and propagate opposition and hate among races. But in the jumble of peoples faced with the proximity of still other diverse peoples, peculiar and active characteristics take shape: ideas and customs, of expansion and acquisition, vanity and avarice, which in a period of internal disorder or in the precipitation of that country's accumulated characteristics, may be able to transform that country from a latent state of national preoccupations to a serious threat to nearby lands, isolated and weak, which the strong country would declare idle and inferior. To think is to serve. Nor must be assumed, through a provincial antipathy, some ingenious and fatal malice on the part of the blond-haired people of the continent just because they do not speak our language, or see a house the way we see it, or because they are not beseeching to us in their political blights, ours being different from theirs; or because one does not find bilious and dark-skinned men in great numbers there, or because from its still uncertain prominence, their country does not look favorably on those who, with less favor in History, are still pursuing the road of the Republic to the last heroic stretch. Nor must one hide the patent facts of the problem, which can be resolved, for the peace of centuries, with the timely study and the tacit and urgent union of the continental soul. Because the united hymn is already sounding; by the road prepared by their sublime parents, this present generation has brought on its back a worker's America; from the Bravo to the Magallanes, seated astride his condor, the Great Semi¹⁵ is sowing throughout the Latin nations of the continent and the sorrowful islands of the sea, the seed of new America!

Notes

Unless otherwise noted, the following notes have been adapted and translated from José Olivio Jimenez's edition of Martí's prose: see José Martí, *Prosa escogida*, ed. José Olivio Jimenez (Madrid: Novelar y cuentos, 1975). Trans.

- 1 This essay was published in *La Revista Ilustrada* (New York) on January 1, 1891, and in *El Partido Liberal* (Mexico City) on January 30, 1891. Along with the speech known under the heading "Madre América" ("Mother America"), this text most concisely and comprehensively sum-

- marizes the Latin-Americanist anxieties and predictions presented in Martí's thought in the face of the threat of U.S. expansion. The title of this work has remained the most accessible one for its readers in the Latin American world.
- 2 Juan de Castellanos. Spanish priest and poet Juan de Castellanos (1522–1607) resided in many places throughout America from a very young age. In 1589, he wrote the extensive *Elegías de varones ilustres de Indias* (*Elegies for Illustrious Gentlemen of the Indies*) in verse, which is of great interest for the numerous facts it presents on American life and history in the sixteenth century.
 - 3 *Incroyables of the French Revolution*. During the period of the 1796 Directory in France, this name was given to certain young men who dressed, spoke, and gestured with an excessive affectation, and who enjoyed a social life of elegance.
 - 4 There has been some debate on the specific intent behind this word choice: *círial* can mean either altar candle or cactus tree. The first meaning would imply the opposition between Enlightenment thought and religious superstition, yet the second would suggest Domingo F. Sarmiento's opposition between civilization and barbarism (see chapter 1). *Trans.*
 - 5 *Hamilton*. Alexander Hamilton (1757–1804), North American statesman who participated in the U.S. War of Independence; he later acquired prestige in public administration as the secretary of the treasury.
 - 6 *Sieyès*. Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès (1748–1836), French statesman and publisher who was involved in the publication of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, as well as the French Constitution of 1791.
 - 7 *A priest . . . and one woman*. The first reference is to Mexican priest and revolutionary Manuel Hidalgo (1753–1811), who gave the first shout of rebellion that incited the War of Liberation in Mexico. The woman alluded to is Josefina Ortiz de Domínguez (d. 1829), wife of Don Manuel Domínguez, mayor of Querétaro, who was persuaded by her to join the independence movement. Mexican modernist poet Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera dedicated one of his most well-known compositions to this event in “La Corregidora” (“The Mayoress”).
 - 8 *A Spanish canon . . . against Spain*. The canon mentioned here is José María Castilla, the Spanish liberal who urged El Salvador to declare its independence; the *general of Spain* is Brigadier General Gabino Gaínza, who accepted the political and military command of the independent government of Guatemala. Both events occurred on September 15, 1821.
 - 9 *Rivadavia*. Bernardino Rivadavia (1780–1845), man of progressive ideas who served as president of the Argentine Republic for a brief period of time (1826–1827).
 - 10 *Make the fair-haired one (Iturbide) an emperor!* In 1822, the Mexican people demanded that the nation's Congress, already freed from Spain, declare Mexican General Agustín Iturbide an emperor. Iturbide ruled in this capacity for ten months, under the name Agustín I.
 - 11 *Vincha*. Handkerchief used by natives on their neck or head.
 - 12 *Cojímar* is the small coastal area in the northern province of Havana, Cuba. *Danzig* is a European port on the coast of the Baltic Sea. For a long time, it was known as the “Free City” of Europe, although it actually belonged to Poland.
 - 13 *Zorrillesque*. Allusion to the extreme style of Spanish romantic poet José Zorrilla (1817–1893).
 - 14 *Juárez*. The great Mexican liberal statesman Benito Juárez (1806–1872), who was the most noteworthy and progressive president of the Mexican Republic in the nineteenth century, was of humble and indigenous origin. The rest of the sentence in the text refers metaphorically and hyperbolically to the pompous and lengthy dictatorial government of Porfirio Díaz (who was in power throughout the entire end of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, provoking the Mexican Revolution of 1910).

- 15 *From the Bravo to the Magallanes, from one tip of Latin America to the other*. The Río Bravo del Norte (Bravo River of the North) begins in Colorado (in the United States), crosses New Mexico and Texas, and empties out into the Gulf of Mexico. *Magallanes* (Magellan) is the name of the meridian strait of South America, called thus by its discoverer, the explorer Ferdinand de Magellan. *Great Semí*. Among the pre-Columbian natives of the Antilles, *Semí* was a divinity who incarnated all the forces of nature.

Appendix 3 Coney Island

In human affairs, nothing equals the marvelous prosperity of the United States of the North.¹ Whether or not deep roots are lacking in them; whether or not the ties that bind sacrifice and a common suffering are more enduring than those that bind the common interest; whether or not this colossal nation will carry ferocious and tremendous elements in its bowels; whether or not the absence of a feminine spirit, origin of artistic sense and complementary to the national being, will prevail and corrupt the heart of this astonishing people, this is what the times will tell.

Now more than ever, it is certainly true that never a happier, merrier, more well-equipped, more jovial, and frenetic crowd has lived around such useful labor in any other region of the land, nor is there one that has brought about and enjoyed a greater fortune, nor is there one that has covered a greater number of rivers and oceans with ships bedecked in merriment, nor is there one that has extended itself with a more tumultuous order and ingenuous happiness through gentle coastlines, gigantic wharves, and glittering and fantastic promenades.

North American newspapers come full of hyperbolic descriptions of the original beauties and singular attractions of one such summer place, overflowing with people, dotted with sumptuous hotels [and] commuted by an aerial railway; sprinkled with gardens, kiosks, small theaters, beer gardens, arenas, tents, innumerable carriages, picturesque assemblies, mobile stalls, auctions, fountains.

French newspapers become a mere echo of this renown.

From the furthest reaches of the American Union come legions of intrepid ladies and gallant peasants to admire the splendid landscapes, the incomparable wealth, the blinding variety, the Herculean drive, the astonishing sight of Coney Island, this famous island, heap of abandoned earth four years ago, and today the spacious area of repose, refuge, and recreation for a hundred thousand New Yorkers who attend the joyful beaches daily.

Four little towns are united by carriageways, streetcars, and steam trains. The first, wherein 4,000 people can easily fit at the same time in the dining room of a given hotel, is called Manhattan Beach; another, which has arisen like Minerva with helmet and spear,² armed with ships, plazas, piers, and murmuring orchestras, is called Rockaway; another, the least important, which takes its name from a hotel of extraordinary capacity and weighty construction, is called Brighton; but the attraction of the island

is not the faraway Rockaway, nor the monotonous Brighton, nor the aristocratic and solemn Manhattan Beach; it is Cable, the laughing Cable, with its elevator higher than the Trinity tower in New York—two times higher than the tower of our cathedral—to whose peak travelers climb, suspended by a diminutive cage at a height that gives one vertigo; it is Cable, with its two iron docks that advance over the sea on elegant pillars three blocks in length, with its Sea Beach Palace, which is no more than a hotel now, and which was once the famed “Agricultural Building” during the Philadelphia Exposition—transported, as if by the art of enchantment, to New York and re-elevated in its original form, without so much as a splint lacking, on the coast of Coney Island; it is Cable, with its fifty-cent museums, where they exhibit human monsters, outlandish fish, bearded women, melancholic dwarves, and rickety elephants, which the advertisement pompously promotes as the largest elephants in the world; it is Cable, with its 100 orchestras, with its cheerful balls, with its battalions of carriages for children, its gigantic cow that, milked night and day, never fails to produce a fresh twenty-five centimeter glass, its countless couples of loving pilgrims who spontaneously burst into those tender lines of García Guitiérrez:³

Aparejadas
van por las lomas
las cogujadas
y las palomas

(Coupled together
they pass through the hills
the crested skylarks
and the doves)

It is Cable, where families attempt to look not for the sulfurous and nauseating air of New York, but the clean and invigorating air of the oceanside, where the poor mothers—all gathered together around one of the tables that one finds free in one of these extremely spacious salons, opening an enormous box full of familial provisions for lunch—squeeze against their breasts their ill-fated babies, who seem as if devoured, drained, eaten away by this terrible disease of summer that cuts down children like the sickle reaps the grain—the *cholera infantum*. Ships come and go; trains whistle, blow smoke, enter and exit, emptying their serpent breast swollen with families onto the beach; women rent their blue flannel outfits and coarse straw hats tied under their chins; men, dressed in simpler garb, lead the women by the hand and enter the sea; the children, barefoot, wait on the wet seashore for the roaring wave to wet them, and they escape when it arrives, concealing their terror with laughs, only to return en masse, as if to defy the enemy in a game that never exhausts the innocents, lying prostrate only an hour earlier from the severe heat; or they enter and leave, like marine butterflies, in the fresh air of the breakers, and since each one comes provided with a bucket and a spade, they entertain each other by filling each other's buckets with the burning sand on the beach; or after they have bathed (imitating, of course,

the conduct of the more serious people of both sexes, who do not hold censure and shock in high regard, as might those who think as we think in this land), they throw themselves on the sand and let themselves be covered, knocked about, massaged, and enveloped in the burning sand, because this is held to be healthy exercise, and for such a singular ease it offers a superficial, ordinary, and uproarious intimacy, at least from the perspective of those prosperous people so full of enthusiasm.

But the shocking thing there is not this way of bathing, nor is it the cadaverous features of the children, nor the capricious hats and incomprehensible dress of those damsels, noted for their prodigality, their extravagance, and their exaggerated disposition toward happiness; nor is it the conversation between lovers, nor the bathhouses, nor the operas sung on café tables, dressed as Edgard and Romeo, and as Lucía and Juliette;⁴ nor is it the grimaces and shouts of the Black minstrels, who could alas! never be like the minstrels from Scotland; nor is it the majestic beach, nor the mild and serene sun; what one finds so shocking there is the size, the quantity, the unexpected effect of human activity, this immense valve of open pleasure on an immense people, these restaurants that seen from afar look like lofty armies, these roads that from a two-mile distance are not roads but long carpets of heads; this daily spillage of an extraordinary people onto an extraordinary beach; this mobility, this talent for advancement, this change of form, this feverish rivalry of wealth, this monumental aspect of this ensemble, which legitimately pits this nation of bathhouses in competition with the majesty of the land that supports it, the sea that caresses it, and the sky that crowns it; this rising tide, this annihilating and incomparable expansiveness, solid and frenetic, and this naturalness in the marvelous; this is what one finds shocking there.

Other peoples—and we among them—live as if devoured by a sublime inner demon, which drives us to the relentless pursuit of an ideal of love or glory; and when we grasp some level of this ideal that we have pursued, with the pleasure of an eagle who seizes its prey, a new urge unsettles us, a new ambition spurs us on, a new aspiration launches us into a new vehement longing, and from the eagle escapes a once-imprisoned free rebel butterfly, as if defying us to follow it, shackling us to its scrambled flight.

Not these tranquil spirits, disturbed only by the anxiety to possess a fortune. The eyes are drawn to those reverberant beaches; one enters and leaves by those passages, as vast as the pampas; one ascends to the peaks of those colossal houses, as high as mountains; seated on chairs along the seashore, strollers fill their lungs with that potent and benevolent air; of course, it is common knowledge that a melancholic sadness seizes the men of our Spanish-American communities who live there, who seek in vain and do not find; for however much their senses grant importance to their first impressions, or captivate their eyes, or their reason darken and obfuscate, these men are possessed by the anguish of solitude in the end, the nostalgia for a higher spiritual world that invades and inflicts them; they feel like sheep without a mother or pastor, astray from the flock; and whether or not it shows in their eyes, the[ir] frightened spirit breaks down in the most bitter torrent of tears, because that great land is bereft of spirit.

But what a coming and going! What a flow of money! What facilities for all to enjoy! What an absolute absence of any sadness or visible poverty! Everything is laid out in the open air: noisy groups, the enormous restaurants, this original love of the North Americans, in which almost none of those elements that constitute the sentimental, tender, and elevated love of our lands enters in. The theater, photography, the bathhouses; everything is open-air. Some lift weights, because for the North Americans, this is a source of positive enjoyment, or of real pain—depending on the number of pounds; others, in exchange for fifty cents, will receive an envelope from a strapping German woman in which their good fortune is written; others, with incomprehensible delight, drink slender long and narrow glasses (in the shape of artillery shells) of distasteful mineral water.

Some climb on spacious carriages that will bring them from Manhattan to Brighton in the gentle twilight hour; another lands his boat, which he was rowing earlier in the company of a smiling girlfriend, as happy as a little girl, who leaps onto the animated beach, supporting herself with a firm grip on his shoulder; one absorbed group admires an artist who is cutting a black piece of paper, which he later stamps onto white cardboard, the silhouette of which he wants to portray in this singular manner; another group celebrates the skill of a lady who, in a stall that cannot measure more than three-quarters of a yard, creates curious flowers made of fish skins; with bellowing laughs, others applaud the skill with which a ball thrower has managed to hit the nose of a misfortunate man of color, who in exchange for a measly day's wage, stands day and night with his frightened head stuck through a hole made in the canvas, avoiding the pitches of the ball throwers with ridiculous movements and exaggerated faces; the bearded and venerable sit heavily on a wooden tiger, or a griffin, or an effigy, or on the back of a boa constrictor, all of which are placed in circles, along with horses, that spin around a central mast for a few minutes to sonatas played out of tune by amateur musicians. The less wealthy eat crabs and oysters on the beach, or sweets and meats laid out on tables for free, as is offered by certain hotels; the well-to-do squander large quantities of fruit punch in doses, which they drink like wine; and in strange and solid delicacies that our palate, accustomed to the artistic and the airy, would doubtless reject.

Such people eat quantity; we, quality.

And this excess waste, this hubbub, this crowd, this scandalous wasp nest, lasts from June to October, from morning until midnight—without interval, without interruption, without any change.

At night, how beautiful it is! True, any thinker would find shocking so many a married woman walking around without husband; so many a woman strolling by the wet seashore with a scarf around her shoulders, wrapped up in her pleasure and unmindful that the all-too-penetrating air must inevitably wound the flaccid nature of her offspring; so many a damsel who leaves her little one behind at the hotel, in the arms of a rough Irish woman; and who, on returning from her long walk, neither takes the child in her arms, nor kisses him on the lips, nor satisfies the crying child's hunger.

At night, there is no panorama of the city more breathtaking than that obtained

on that Cable beach. Does one see the heads of people during the day? One sees even more lights at night. Seen at some distance from the sea, the four populations, radiant in the shadows, look as if the stars that populate the sky had unexpectedly fallen into the seas and had been reunited into four colossal groups.

The electric lights inundate the hotel plazas, the English gardens, the concert areas, the beach itself where one can count beneath that vibrant light the grains of sand, with a magic and caressing clarity. From afar these places seem like restless higher spirits, laughing and diabolical spirits that pass through the morbid gaslights, the threads of red lamps, Chinese orbs, Venetian chandeliers. As in the full light of day, one can read newspapers, billboard signs, letters, everywhere. It is a town of stars; and there lie the orchestras, the dances, the hullabaloo, the crash of the surf, the noise of men, the chorus of laughs, the pleasure of the air, the loud cry of street vendors, the swift trains, the light carriages; until, when the time to return has arrived, like a monster that empties its bowels entirely into the hungry jaws of another monster, that colossal crowd, crushed and compact, mobs the entrances of the trains that moan when they are full, as if tired from the weight, on their way through the solitude that they transform by redeeming it; and they later yield their mixed-up cargo to the gigantic ocean liners, lit up by harps and violins, that lead to the wharves and sprinkle the tired passengers into a thousand cars and roads like veins of iron, across slumbering New York City.

Notes

- 1 This chronicle first appeared in the Colombian (Bogotá) magazine *La Pluma*, 3 December 1881. See José Martí, *Obras Completas*, vol. 9 (Havana: Editorial Nacional de Cuba, 1963-1965), 121-28. Trans.
- 2 *Minerva*. Roman goddess; originally the Greek goddess Athena, who was born from the head of Zeus completely armed for battle.
- 3 Antonio García Gutiérrez. Spanish playwright and poet (1813-1844).
- 4 *Edgardo and . . . Lucía*. Characters from the opera *Lucía de Lammermoor* (1835), written by Italian composer Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848).