

---

PATRICK MADDEN

---

## Divers Weights and Divers Measures

### Invocation

Between our visits to Uruguay, Karina's brother sent me a birthday present: *El libro de los abrazos* by Eduardo Galeano: *The Book of Embraces*.

Not long after that I was speaking on the telephone to David Lazar, a friend and university professor, and he, knowing my affinity for things Uruguayan, asked, "Have you ever read Eduardo Galeano? I used to teach *The Book of Embraces*."

And I laughed at the cosmic coincidence, the alignment of the spheres, the serendipity of my fated encounter with the book that I had not yet read but which would soon work in me a mighty change with the author who was to lodge himself in my brain and never leave me alone.

"I have the book on my lap," I said, already understanding that sometimes the Spirit whispers, but also sometimes shouts.

Not long after that the subject came up in a conversation in a bar with a group of others; David was telling the story and stumbled, wondering, "Was it me who had the book on my lap or was that you?"

### After the Panic of Responsibility for Translating This Country into Words on a Page

What, then, if I simply state the singing of the frogs, some chirping, some crying, and the fade of the blue sky on the horizon to the purple overhead, and the silhouettes of palm trees above the regular, rectangular shapes of apartments. There is wind, which I see in the movement of trees and feel in the stuffing of hands into pockets, and the young men running drills at the soccer field in front of my house ignore me, in the Spanish sense, which is passive: they simply do not know I exist.

### Eyes without a Face

I went to the Hipopotamo cafeteria restaurant because their sign near the door had a picture of pepperoni pizza, but they only had ham and olives when I asked. I got it anyway and took my tray to a far corner in an open

patio and tried to hold a book with one hand and eat with the other. It was near 6 P.M., several hours after or before eating time in Uruguay, and there were only a few people here and there, four women in navy-blue business suits talking quietly, a couple holding hands across their table, a solitary girl with glasses, a few others. I moved a plant whose leaves were tickling my neck. I tried to settle into my reading. Billy Idol had other plans. From the speaker near my head I heard the first ethereal notes, the understressed syncopation of "Eyes without a Face." And suddenly it struck me that I alone would be required to bear the brunt of the song's inanity, that for everyone else this was just background music, but for me it had meaning, or a challenge to meaning, and a history of my sister's friend who had MTV before anyone else, and the big kids building forts and bike trails in the woods, and hide-and-seek with the Lepore's front step as base in spite of their grandmother's repeated warnings about running over her plants, which kept on until they moved, and then we did, and then one day at the computer, but not at the restaurant, we understand that inanity is only the beginning.

### Translating Beauty

There are boys across the street from my house kicking a soccer ball around and talking, shouting to one another. I only half hear them, rarely understanding their words, but I am comforted by the din of their voices. Between me and them there are flowering bushes, both white and red flowers, but the beauty is not necessarily in the flowers, or perhaps that beauty is too easy (and God was not in the whirlwind), the beauty is floating on the air, even as a truck passes, grumbling, and a dog barks angrily, and the two ditches between me and the boys flow with plastic bottles and wrappers. The beauty is their simple joy kicking a ball with friends on a lazy day, unaware of me here writing about them, never to know even this ephemeral, impersonal verbal reduction poorly afforded them by an unknown would-be writer, faking it when he gets it right.

They are collecting strands of leaves from a small willow tree. A boy grabs on to a clump with both hands and swings.

### Fleet

Easily forgotten and meaningless unless captured, held in memory, released to new life in language: walking quickly along a darkened block under shifting shadows from streetlamps through tree branches; ahead an open window, light spilling to a rectangle below tracing contours on the sidewalk tiles, giving depth; inside the window a cluttered desk with stacks of papers and books, a *maté* gourd and some pens, an open note-

book and writing too distant and too quickly gone to read, behind and beside wooden shelves filled with leather-bound books; then it's gone except for the extrapolations and imaginations of a person hidden from view in another room eating a meal or arguing with a spouse, wanting nothing more than to return to this haven, to soak up those words, to ponder and to wonder, sipping *maté*, gazing through the window out into the Montevideo night.

### The Boxer

Ever since I talked with Sandro the Peruvian bus minstrel about his job and favorite music and adaptations of indigenous melodies such as Paul Simon's "El Condor Pasa (If I Could)," I have had Simon and Garfunkel's "The Boxer" in my head, off and on.

Then I was riding the bus through Sayago, and the radio played "The Boxer," a rare occurrence, and I sang it softly, feeling melancholy and lost in its sad tale. Then I saw a kid outside on the curb, standing on his tiptoes and waving into the bus, but whoever he was waving at didn't see him. I could tell by his face, crestfallen, lost, as the bus zoomed past, and Simon and Garfunkel sang,

*Then I'm laying out my winter clothes  
And wishing I was gone,  
Going home*

And this kid who I know nothing about and who I've never met and will never see again is suddenly the embodiment of the song. It's not the lyrics, exactly, because it's not winter, not New York City, and who knows if he's on his own. But something in the whole of the song, a whole bigger than its ingredients and generally available to every one of us, no matter our specifics, connects in this moment to this kid, a couple of blocks back by now, turning away dejectedly, wondering if she saw him and chose not to wave, wondering if he should mention it next time he sees her, *if* he sees her.

### Hindsight

Revealing was my conversation with Pascuale, an old Italian who immigrated to Uruguay when he was a young man. His son is now in Italy. We talked about the rumor I had always heard that if you have Italian lineage (my English grandfather, Edward Guisepppe Juilio Emanuele Seymour Stone, was, by a strange twist, born in Italy), you can apply for citizenship easily. He confirmed it, but said that because of the recent influx, now you have to be the child of an Italian citizen, not just a grandchild or

great-grandchild. I told him he should advertise his services to adopt Uruguayans who want to go to Italy. We had a good laugh.

But most revealing was this: He said when he was a young man, everybody was leaving Italy, going to the United States. His sister, even, who married an Italian, lives in the United States (New Jersey, of course, which is where I grew up). When I asked him why, with everybody going to the United States, he came to Uruguay, he smiled and said, "*Un error.*"

### Why I'm Still on Page 75 of *The Motorcycle Diaries*

As soon as I could, I switched from the sideways seats facing the *guardia* to the forward-facing seats immediately behind, or, as it were, to the side of them, because the sideways seats are reserved for the elderly, the feeble, and mothers with children.

I started reading Che's diaries from his formative motorcycle trip around South America, but the jostling was too much, and the sun was low, and my eyes began to ache.

Then a young woman sat down in front of me. She was bleached blonde and nose-pierced with bell-bottomed patchwork jeans and a fluffed button-down tie-dye shirt. She seemed aloof, surly, self-absorbed. But one mustn't judge.

Then a mother with a baby sat next to the young woman, the baby in a red-checkered sun dress, with big brown eyes and Pebbles hair in one pony tail on top. She peeked from behind her hands, laughing, self-absorbed. But one mustn't judge.

One thinks of the distance, of one's own daughter, and what one can't control between here and there, an infinitude of forces molding and nudging. Outside the lights shine on Super Fresco Hard Discount store. People enter, others leave, the bus is past, and as I turn my head to hold the image, the light turns and people walk briskly, purposefully.

### The Tree Flies . . .

Early Sunday morning after the storm the water glints knowingly from the worn patches on the soccer field in front of my house as I walk past briskly on my way to church.

Leaves from our palm trees, giant fingered fronds with husky stems ripped from the trunks in the violent wind the night before, are strewn in our yard, our neighbor's yard, the street, the ditches. Just past the soccer field's eastern goal line I see two giant leaves lying exhausted, beaten, but triumphant, having flown farther than the rest, and immediately and inescapably I smile; from somewhere in my mind I hear *Goooooool!*

### Past Time

It was getting late and long past dark when I made it back to 18 de Julio, the street, just two days before the date which commemorates the oath on the newly independent Uruguay's constitution in 1830. As I turned the corner I saw a crowd milling in front of a window, staring intently at a scene inside, out of my view. There were police among them, decked out in reflexive yellow slickers and shower caps on their hats. I wondered why they were just standing there, not rushing to aid or restore order.

I took far longer than any Uruguayan would have to realize that there was no disturbance in the restaurant, that the waiters were serving as they always did, the customers eating as they always did, the Uruguayan national team playing against Argentina, their arch rivals, as they almost always did, disappointingly, but well enough to tie, eventually, after I had walked past and arrived home, and the policemen had moved on to other vantages, had gloried and had suffered, twice each, and had ended up more or less where they started, somewhere under the yellow lights of 18 de Julio or some other street, waiting for something to happen.

### Utterly Forgettable

Waiting for the 130 at the corner of Paysandú and Florida, or the D5, or, in a pinch, if nothing else comes, the 147 or 148, which drops you off too far from home, which is far enough from the closest bus stops anyway, and it's cold and getting late. Across the street, orange light from an upper floor through open shutters and balcony slats, a view of the ceiling, and a hand gentle on a cello's neck, moving quickly, firmly, pausing, without sound. Once on the bus, lights flash by, the drone numbs, the faceless man next to you whistles along with "A Heart Needs a Second Chance," and you're almost tempted to glance at him, but he gets off at the next stop, and Dennis Brown sings on to nobody but you.

### Perspective

I don't think I asked, but Roger Tijman told me anyway why he traipsed all over northwestern Montevideo with his bicycle seeking out stories and advertisers for his self-published, socialist newspaper *La Bicicleta*:

"When you've got only one watch," he said, "you always know exactly what time it is."

He paused.

"But if you've got two, you're no longer so sure."

### Unhappened

With all our preoccupation about events, happenings, things we can photograph and tell stories about, sometimes there is just Karina reading

*Confessions of an Ex-Torturer*, and its backstory of a decade of military rule in proudly democratic Uruguay when she was growing up, unaware because she had nothing to contrast it with, and untouched, except for those times her father, a wandering salesman with a yen for subversive folk music, was jailed without charge then soon released, but she gets near the end, in the appendices, among the photos of torturers, and begins to cry. With prodding she finally explains, "This man's son killed my brother."

### Sorrow Comes in the Form of a Sister's Tears across a Cathode-ray Tube

Because Shannon Hoon, former lead singer for Blind Melon, who videotaped his life along the way to fame, and then at its pinnacle, including his drug abuse and the birth of his daughter who caused him to swear he would quit and get clean, and we are sitting watching his mother sister girlfriend bandmates lamenting the loss of such a vibrant creative soul to his demons addictions stupidity insecurities, when something glistening in Karina's eyes, something whispered about should have called her family today, something about ten years ago today, awakens in me a memory of her own loss, her brother killed not by his slow steady suicide of pushing limits seeking escape or ecstasy but by a fellow army officer's gun, misfired while being cleaned, depending if you believe that or not.

### Signals

The highways in Uruguay spread out like veins in a leaf, spokes on a half-wheel, balsa-wood supports in a Japanese fan. I cannot recall, have never really learned, whether a two-lane highway is two lanes total or two lanes going each way, so I will explain that Uruguayan highways are—for the most part, soon after you get out of the capital city of Montevideo, supposing you're traveling *out* of the city—one lane in each direction, thin and sinuous, a dotted yellow line dividing to and fro, here and there, toward and away.

As I traveled the roads at night, a passenger in a friend's car, I noted curiously the turn signals of the trucks in front of us and that my friend would pass, though he could not see oncoming traffic, when a truck's right blinker signaled that it was safe. Left means there is someone coming, don't pass; right means nobody, safe. A part of me wants to know the origins of the system, which seems to me very sensible, rational. But I hold back from asking, content with the functionality, the mystery, the completeness, the ephemeral bonds of trust forged each night in the dark on the highways of Uruguay.

# NDQ

North Dakota Quarterly

# NDQ

North Dakota Quarterly

Robert W. Lewis, *Editor*  
Elizabeth Harris Bealing, *Fiction Editor*  
Donald Junkins, *Poetry Editor*  
Brian Paulsen, *Jrnl Editor*  
Kale Sweney, *Managing Editor*  
Brook Berglund, *Production Assistant*  
Kanwal Hyder, *Graduate Intern*  
Melissa Monday, *Graduate Intern*  
Andrea Herbst, *Undergraduate Intern*  
Corn Nasset, *Undergraduate Intern*

Volume 75, Number 1

Winter 2008

MEMBER  
  
Council of Editors  
of Learned Journals

Copyright 2008 by the University of North Dakota

ISSN 0029-277X

Advisory Editors  
Michael Anderegg  
Michael C. Beard  
Sharon Carson  
John C. Crawford  
Elizabeth M. Hampsten  
Birgit Hans  
Susan Koprince  
James Moorhousk  
Dexter Perkins  
Kimberly K. Porter

#### Contributing Editors

Linda Patterson Miller, *Pennsylvania State University*  
Peter Nabokov, *UCLA*  
Thomas Van Norwick, *Oberlin College*  
Fred Whitehead, *University of Kansas*  
Jean Pagan Yellin, *Pace University*

*North Dakota Quarterly* is published four times a year by the College of Arts and Sciences of the University of North Dakota. Printing is by the University of North Dakota Printing Center. Subscription rates are \$25.00 per year for individuals, \$30 for institutions; foreign rates are \$45 individuals and \$50 institutions; \$10.00 per single copy (\$15 foreign); \$15 for special issues (\$19 foreign). All correspondence concerning editorial business, change of address, subscription, and proof returners should be directed to the Editor, *North Dakota Quarterly*, Merrifield Hall Room 3579, Central Drive, Stop 2009, Grand Forks, North Dakota 58202-7209. (Our e-mail address is [ndq@und.edu](mailto:ndq@und.edu)). Our website address is <http://www.und.nodak.edu/ndq/>. *North Dakota Quarterly* assumes no responsibility for statements of fact or opinion by its contributors. Manuscripts (with SASE) should follow the *MLA Handbook* style, 6th edition. *North Dakota Quarterly* is indexed in *Humanities International Complete*, the annual *MLA Bibliography 1*, and the *Annual Index to American History and Life*, which may be found in many libraries throughout North America.

#### ON THE COVER

Timothy Ray's *Kimono* is a collage of thread, pigment, and acrylic on washi (Japanese paper). Ray's collages were influenced by experiences with making paper by hand and trips to Japan. *Kimono* is in the collection of Al and Merry Bloomquist. Ray is retired from teaching art at Minnesota State University at Moorhead and lives in Moorhead.

### Benediction

During one of our visits to Uruguay, I sat in Montevideo's oldest café, El Brasileró, established 1879, conversing with Eduardo Galeano about his life and writing, drinking a grapefruit soda that he bought me.

He said,

The only definition of art that convinces me is one that says "Art is a lie that tells the truth." We begin with the moment an act happens in reality, outside an author's head, and then the author reproduces in himself what happened outside himself. Then this idea, this reproduction of the act inside the author's head, also becomes part of reality. The original act, which comes directly or indirectly from reality, is transfigured in the process of creation.