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**“Holding Together: Trauma, Memory, and the Destiny of Latin America” –
A South American Perspective**

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When Christopher Columbus, on his first voyage of discovery, sighted a range of hills alive with silver along the coast of what would in the far future be known as the Dominican Republic, he believed – or so the legend goes – that his dreams of unending riches had finally come true. As he was in the habit of baptizing everything he saw, he proceeded, on the 11th day of January of 1493 to give to the largest Mount glinting phantasmagorically under the sun the Spanish word for silver – Plata. Although in fact he continued past those hills without setting foot on them, their present day inhabitants assure anyone who cares to listen that the Admiral did indeed land and, upon seeing the white shiny leaves of the llam-ilam trees turning over with the breeze, winking with sunlight, he morosely understood the illusion under which he had been labouring.

That disappointment of Columbus, as recounted in tales handed down by generation upon generation of Dominicans, may be apocryphal, but the story originates in a core of truths: the truth of the trees that once covered an entire island, the truth of the insatiable Spanish quest for wealth in the the lands that were soon to be called New, the truth that things in that World rarely turned out to be what they seemed nor the way they were planned. Because if Columbus were to disembark on that coast over five hundred years later, he would find those hills eroded and treeless, filled with makeshift shacks, open sewers, garbage-littered alleyways. And yet, the name, Puerto Plata, Port of Silver, persists, whispering to its inhabitants, most of them mired in despair and poverty, that perhaps someday things will get better, stubbornly whispering a promise of Paradise.

So the story of Latin America, from the very start, includes both an early utopian longing and its almost immediate frustration. This contradiction has persisted through the ages, coming down to us in two central attitudes between which Latin Americans today wildly swing , **Qué maravilla!** and **Somos un desastre**, that we habitually use to refer to our contemporary condition.

Qué maravilla! could roughly be translated as “How marvellous!”, the celebration by Latin Americans of the wonders of their own lands, a fierce attachment to the amazing variety of climates and landscapes, races and languages, cultures and animals and plants that fill and delight our lives. Almost every human ethnia has found its way to our continent and mingled there – Europeans of every kind, and Africans, of course, and Asians, as well, not only the small contingents of Japanese and Chinese and Korean immigrants, but the major waves of wanderers who originally crossed the Bering Straits thousands of years ago and gave birth to the Indians who then proceeded to cover the lands from pole to pole. But more wonderful, perhaps, is another sort of diversity, first spelled out by the Cuban novelist, Alejo Carpentier, in his 1953 novel, **Los Pasos Perdidos, The Lost Steps**, where a musicologist in search of the origins of humanity takes a trip to the godforsaken interior of Latin America and advances into the successive layers of time past, our continent as the only place on the planet in which all the periods of history still coexist side by side, where all the styles and customs and experiences that the West has developed and exported and imposed upon other lands remain intact and ready to visit as if in a living museum, Carpentier proposes Latin America as a continent where the modern and the prehistoric and everything in between subsist and endure next to each other. **Qué maravilla!** Latin America as a place where anything can happen, everything is possible.

Unfortunately what did happen was a catastrophe – and we come, therefore, inevitably, as the continent itself did, to that second phrase, or attitude, or mood: **Somos un desastre**, which can be inadequately translated as “We are a disaster”. If the English version sounds strange to our ears, it may be because the Spanish language formulation is itself rather awkward. Note that we Latin Americans are not demanding to know why we are living a disaster (**porqué vivimos un desastre?**), why such a condition has befallen us, but stating rather that our being is itself a calamity, the fact that we understand existence in the Americas south of the Rio Grande as a permanent cataclysm. Even when we most enjoy life, even when we are at our most sensual and playful and **maravillados**, filled with awe and gratitude and astonishment, it is hard to escape the apprehension that something has gone terribly wrong, we wonder how it can be, now that we approach the bi-centenary of our Independence, that a continent with such enormous potential wealth and extraordinary human resources has ended up as an economic and political – though not a cultural – failure. Oh yes, we have survived up till now, “held together” - to quote the words that steer this series of Conferences celebrating the centenary of Australia’s federation, the successful centenary of your federation –, but what sort of price have we paid for that conjoining, what have we had to do to one another in order to keep from disintegrating? And who is to blame for that inability of Latin America to live up to its originating utopian promise?

The first and most influential answer to these questions was given, in 1845, by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, a young Argentine who had fled the tyranny of Rosas, in a book titled **Facundo**, appropriately known as the founding text of Latin American historiography, journalism and literature, so striking and adventurous that it has framed every subsequent debate on the subject, indeed created the paradigm through which our nations have since then conceived and perceived themselves, even for those of us who are critical of Sarmiento’s vision.

Sarmiento was thirty-four years old when he created **Facundo** from his Chilean exile – exactly the age, he was quick to point out in later essays, of his country’s Independence;

and found himself, therefore, in the perfect position to ponder how it was that the rebellion against the Spanish colonial master, and the glorious Enlightenment ideals that had inspired those insurrections all over Latin America, had led to interminable civil wars, economic decline, unyielding backwardness. In order to stem the tide of anarchy and chaos, or to “hold together”, our Republics were increasingly being governed by conservative and dictatorial regimes. How was it that the Latin American revolutions, dedicated to liberty, fraternity and equality, had ended up with the opposite of what they had set out to do? Faced with this enigma, particularly in contrast with the incredible success story of the United States, shining ominously to the North of the same hemisphere, Sarmiento came up with an explanation that was pithily phrased, a dichotomy that served as the subtitle of his book: **Civilización y Barbarie**. We are caught, Sarmiento, said, in an epic battle between the forces of Civilization and the forces of Barbarism. The wild Natural world of Latin America – specifically the pampas in the case of Argentina – had taken possession of the hearts and minds of far too many inhabitants of the new fatherland, and it was this demonic energy that needed to be tamed and domesticated, submitted to white European rationality and industry. If we wish to master the disintegrating forces of both the colonial past and of savage nature, if we wish to enter, like the United States, the concert of nations, the only way, Sarmiento said, was the disciplined road of Progress: in order to catch up with Europe we need to replicate its example, break with the past so that the freedom and spirit of enterprise that have led the established powers of the West to pre-eminence can be repeated here in a more youthful and creative way.

These were not destined to be merely abstract ideas.

When many years later Sarmiento became President of Argentina (and he served in other governments as Minister of Education and Minister of Home Affairs) he turned his formula of Civilization or Barbarism into public policy, he tried to exorcise the frightful wildness lurking inside the soul of Latin America, and perhaps his own soul, perhaps subconsciously attempting to separate himself and his Westward looking Argentina from what he considered the genetically inferior Indian blood which coursed through the veins of so many of his countrymen. Whatever the psychological motives– and there were plenty of economic and political reasons that could also be mentioned -, the fact is that Sarmiento helped put into place a series of measures that sought to turn Argentina into one Nation and that were carried out as the century wore on. Primary school instruction was offered to all the children of the Republic; technology, capital and cultural models were imported from abroad; the nomad Indians who roamed the plains were exterminated in la **Campaña del Desierto**¹ and thousands of European settlers were persuaded to come and colonize those supposedly empty territories. A similar process, of course, was happening not only in the rest of Latin American but all across the globe during the latter half of the nineteenth century – as superior technological military capacity led to the subjugation of indigenous peoples who had held out for centuries against Western incursions. As Sarmiento himself was to write many years later, “If this terrible procedure of civilization is barbaric and cruel to the eyes of justice and reason, it is, like war itself, like conquest, one of the ways Providence has armed diverse human races, and among these the most powerful and advanced, to replace those who, by their

¹ The very name, the Desert Campaign, suggesting a zone without worthy human inhabitants who did not possess the land because they did not cultivate, turn it into a source of exportable goods.

organic weakness or backwardness [stand] in civilization's path, [and] cannot achieve the great destinies of man on earth."

Sarmiento recognized that Latin America had arrived late on the world scene and that it was therefore condemned to be a secondary player on the world stage unless its fledgling Republics could match the foreign imperial powers, unless its elites could harness the enormous dynamism and resources of these new lands to the freedom and technology necessary for real development. This meant that those impaired inhabitants of the Americas who were holding back the march towards modernization would either have to be eradicated from the Earth or integrated through education into the mainstream, made into citizens, Europeanized.

In the name of the nation, the wandering and dangerous remaining tribes of the Americas were terrorized into submission, made to live thenceforth, in fact, the sedentary experience that most of the other Indians of the continent had been going through since the Iberian Conquest and Colonization, since the widespread Aztec, Mayan and Inca civilizations in Mexico and Central America and the Andean region had been overcome and its millions upon millions of inhabitants made into a workforce that toiled the mines and the fields and yes, the beds and bedrooms. These enormous masses of indigenous peoples had not been eliminated or assimilated over the centuries. They had continued to breed, to keep (and modify, of course) their languages and cultures and, from time to time, had burst into major uprisings, in Guatemala and Ecuador and Peru and, above all, in Mexico where they participated in two revolutions that had at their center the need to redistribute land and water. During the end of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth the Indian "question" came up again and again, what to do with these people who seemed to live in the past and whose sloth and otherness was blamed for the backwardness of a Latin America, lagging ever farther behind the United States and Europe.

This policy differed from the racist and immoral policies set in motion in the United States and other parts of the world (for instance, Australia), only inasmuch as it fortunately did not accomplish what it set out to do. I use that word fortunately because I am part of a counter-tendency in Latin American intellectual thought that believes that, rather than blaming our rank human diversity for this underdevelopment, responsibility should instead be assigned to the unwillingness of our rulers to include those who are different as real partners in the national consensus and entertain a genuine dialogue with them. And that word, diversity, does not, of course, only comprise the so-called Indians, but also the vast throngs of the dispossessed of Latin America, the slaves transported from Africa and their descendants, the workers of whatever colour who have fought in the mines and the factories for a decent life for themselves and their children and national control over the resources owned by foreign companies, the peasants who take over the farmlands from which their ancestors were expelled, the homeless squatters in the cities occupying vacant buildings and empty lots, all these, and also, of course, the many others, the more well-to-do who took up the cause of those excluded millions, students and lawyers and doctors, all those who continue to rebel, generation after pariah generation, incessantly demanding to redefine the nation that has proscribed them. And yet, how not to recognize as well that, in the past, almost every one of the leaders who headed these social movements was killed, they all ended up, my heroes, as martyrs, torn apart, betrayed, invaded, destroyed, overthrown, banished, Tupac Amaru and Zapata and Arbenz and Salvador Allende. If it is true that the resisting multitudes have been able to prove by their mere persistence and rejection of the choice between

civilization and barbarism, between disappearing and assimilating, that Sarmiento was wrong, showing how fragile and precarious and unstable is the nation that would be built without their presence, but it is also incontestable that those legions of the excluded are not the ones who have determined the fundamental direction of Latin America and have not been able to change the terms that Sarmiento stated so many years ago, nor change, indeed, the very conditions of structural inferiority that shaped Sarmiento's thought and solutions. Even as, decade after decade, the cause of an alternative version of Latin America kept on resurrecting, the men in power, the men who decided the rules of the game, the men who kept on dreaming of silver in the trees and of obedient bodies to extract that silver, these men continued to insist, as if they were deaf, that the deep problems of the continent could be solved without taking into account the desires of those bodies and the resistance by those bodies to the plans hatched from above and abroad. The men in power went on telling themselves and their nations that at some point those inflexible, recalcitrant populaces needed to be helped into conveniently disappearing.

I got my first taste of this blindness and perhaps also a hint of its costs, just a few days after I arrived in August of 1954 in what was to be my adopted country, Chile.

I was a twelve year old lad, born in Argentina and brought up during the last decade in New York, not speaking – by my own volition – not even a word of Spanish, not knowing very much about Latin America except that it was a dreaded place to which I would have to resign myself before heading back in a few years' time, or so I thought, to my beloved United States. Almost as if I had inadvertently been following the secret instructions murmured to me by the dead Sarmiento, that compatriot of mine whose name I did not even know, suggesting that I erase my origins, make myself into a civilized gringo. One of my father's Chilean subordinates at the U. N. regional offices – an economist who answered to the name of Pepe and whose surname I would rather not reveal -, in order to ingratiate himself with the new boss, had taken the family, minus my Dad, on a tour of the city we would henceforth call home, culminating with a climb to the top of a small hill in the center of Santiago, the Cerro Santa Lucía, where the Spanish conquistador Pedro de Valdivia had founded the city in 1540, choosing a place easy to fortify against the encroaching and bellicose Mapuche Indians who, in fact, three years later, would ambush Valdivia and, the legend goes, pour down his dead throat the molten gold that was the primary reason why he had journeyed this far South. As we mounted towards the summit, our new friend Pepe off-handedly remarked that, of course, there were no Indians left in Chile today. An opinion, by the way, that I was to hear repeated tirelessly over the years innumerable times by Chilean high society.

I knew next to nothing back then, as I have said, about that country or any other Latino land, but I did have eyes – and I had seen the dark features of people crowding the streets, I had seen the bronze-skinned workers on the Valparaiso dock where our ship had arrived, my glance had caught the slanted eyes of the slum-dwellers watching our car speed by on the way to Santiago, I had even caught a glimpse of a couple of women in native dress selling herbs and trinkets on a corner. So it was clear to this child who came from what was even then the multicultural city of New York, that Chile was filled to the brim with Indians and their descendants. "Descendants, yes," Pepe answered, when my mother gently voiced out loud the same doubts her son was harboring more quietly, "but no more real Indians, like there were back in the time of the Conquistadors. No more pure Indians like this one."

And Pepe stopped in front of a large statue, the replica of a muscular Indian with noble, almost Hollywood-like features, standing in quiet defiance almost at the summit of the hill that had once, presumably, belonged to him and his people.

“This is Caupolicán,” our guide said, “the great Araucanian warrior who resisted the Spanish invasion in the sixteenth century and was martyred by his foes.”

“He doesn’t look very martyred,” I said, pesky kid that I was. “What did they do to him?”

Pepe reddened slightly. His command of English, already clumsy, began to falter even more. “They – they put him on a large wooden stake, you know, from beneath – they – you know, up his – and that made him bleed to death.”

“Why didn’t the sculptor show the death then?” I persisted, with the typical coarse curiosity of a twelve-year old. That would have been a sight, I thought to myself: a warrior with a stake up his ass, bleeding into oblivion!

As if he could read my mind, our friend Pepe muttered that it was better to remember heroes in less awkward positions, a matter of public decorum, this effigy was reproduced extensively in school texts and in other public places, etcetera, etcetera. None of which answered another question that had crept into my mind. Why did the statue stir in me a vague reminiscence, as if I had seen it somewhere before – but that was impossible, I knew less about native Chileans than I did about Chile itself, so I held my tongue and did not give the matter a second thought until several decades later when, while doing research for a novel, I discovered the full and perverse story of how the last moments of Caupolicán on this Earth had come to be sanitized in that block of stone.

To begin with, Caupolicán had not been the original name given to the the statue by Nicanor Plaza. This Chilean sculptor – born in 1844, a few streets away from where the exiled Sarmiento was writing his **Facundo** - had been commissioned in the late 1860s by some gringos at the U.S. embassy in Santiago to make a likeness of an authentic Araucanian Indian. But Plaza who then went on to sculpt his work of art shuttered up in a Parisian studio, having no idea what such a primitive specimen might look like, probably never having tried to even really behold one, decided instead to copy an Indian from an engraving he detected in **The Last of the Mohicans**, the novel by the yankee writer James Fennimore Cooper. This stone likeness, back in Chile, was indignantly rejected by his patrons, who did not wish to transport back to the States an American Indian from the North masquerading as an aborigine from the South. And so Nicanor Plaza was left with a slab of chiseled stone that was useless, useless, that is unless he. . . Yes, the Cerro Santa Lucía was being remodeled as a distinguished park full of all sorts of imported busts and steps and chapels – and thus, when the new grounds and esplanades were inaugurated in 1873, at the very moment when the Indian warriors were losing the lands they had held onto for centuries and being pushed farther and farther South, away from Santiago, lapsing into a sort of irrelevant stupor of invisibility, Plaza’s statue, re-baptized Caupolicán, was exhibited for the edification of visitors, to be thenceforth integrated into the memory of the nation and future schoolchildren.

How is it that the Committee that selected monuments for the park could accept that false version of an Araucanian Indian, that copy of what was already a phony Northamerican Indian? At a time when the remote great grandchildren of Caupolicán

were being pushed away from the centers of power and no longer constituted a threat, left to fester in faraway **reducciones indígenas**, what could be more convenient for the élites who wanted to differentiate their recently constituted nations from the former Spanish rulers, than to resurrect alternative ancestors under the guise of the noble savage, that Western myth of innocence that had accompanied and complemented the malevolent and satanic versions of the indigenous as the colonial powers expanded across the globe? The Committee was able to pay for that statue precisely because it had no connection to any real Indian dreaming under the Chilean moon or resisting under the Chilean sun or working for a Chilean wage, and – more crucially, perhaps – because that statue did not have a large stake jutting into the guts and intestines of its counterfeit Araucanian **cacique**, I believe it was the absence of torture that gave that statue its real value.

So Caupolicán was killed twice, once in the torments the Spanish visited upon him, and a second time in the forgetting, his trauma masked and disguised and twisted beyond any recognizable form, absorbed into the national mythology so that any adult could casually tell a child of twelve that there were no more Indians, so that every adult could comfortably acknowledge the Indian past without delving into the Indian pain. Forcing us to avoid the question that effectively matters: where is he? Where is Caupolicán? If there was somebody real, of flesh and blood and bones, who, back in the 1540s, was tortured to death by the marauders who invaded his land, then what is left of him? Where are the other Indians who followed him into death? Where is the Mapuche woman who, not far from where he died, where they died, where is she, the woman who, at the time of the Conquest, was thrown down onto the soil of Chile with her legs forced open, where is the woman who was penetrated in a different manner than Caupolicán had been, where is she, how does she fit into the memory of the nation, how does he, how does she, how do they, presently lost in a mirage, claim their share in that nation?

I wish I were only speaking about the long-ago dead, about distant memories, about old battles, I wish I were not speaking about now. But unfortunately I speak of today. What was done to Caupolicán and that unnamed Indian woman and their many brothers and sisters at the dawn of Latin American history, has been recycled in many other forms throughout that history. Not only the multiplication of terror, but the incessant forgetting of that terror. Yesterday is today.

Consider what has just happened in Chile, recently emerged a mere ten years ago from a dictatorship where the sort of suffering inflicted upon Caupolicán was visited upon thousands upon thousands of citizens who had dared in the past to dream of a truly encompassing version of the country. If I have been able to speak about the disappearing of Indians from the consciousness of the powerful of Latin America it is because the word itself, **desaparecido**, has been forced upon me by history and is now notorious around the globe. It describes what was being perpetrated by the Pinochet regime – not to mention the military regimes in Argentina and Uruguay, Brasil and Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras -, the active disappearance of dissidents, men and women who were arrested and whose whereabouts were denied, whose bodies were not even returned for burial, dumped into the sea or ploughed into the fields, so that there could be no memorial, supposedly no memory, no place to gather and remember and commemorate. What was once done primarily to the Indians, now imposed upon many others who did not consider themselves indigenous at all, used against whoever might protest Chile's lack of freedom, Chile's forced modernization, Chile's accelerated integration into the global market.

Shades of Sarmiento, yesterday is today.

When it took over the country in 1990, the newly elected government of Chile was faced with a difficult situation: the victory of the democratic forces had left intact the power of the military and its followers as well as the economic hegemony of a small group of wealthy Chileans who had grown even richer under the dictatorship, which meant that the new democratic rulers were severely restricted in what they could or could not do. The question of how to hold together a country that was exceptionally divided by decades of civil strife and differing interpretations of the recent past, became paramount and closely related to how the new government understood the nation's trauma and how it wanted to present that nation's future, not only to its own people, but to a planet that automatically identified Chile with torture, Chile with arbitrariness, Chile with suffering and insurgency. Not the best sales pitch for a country that beckons enticingly to tourists and investment bankers.

By one of those strange coincidences that history seems to love, particularly in demented Latin America, the first occasion to remake my country's image and export a more positive version of it abroad was the 1992 World's Fair in Sevilla dedicated to celebrating the five hundred years of the Americas. What the Chilean government bizarrely decided to do, with the assistance of the Armed Forces and the business community that had enthusiastically gorged itself during the dictatorship, was to choose an iceberg as the representation of the new Chile, proceeding to hack an enormous slab of ice out of the cold mountains of Antarctica and then cart it across the Atlantic to be exhibited in the burning heat of Sevilla. A benevolent observer might try to construe this snaring of a floating glacier as an extravagant way of reinserting Chile in the magical realist tradition of the rest of Latin America, but in fact, the organizers of the expedition had a symmetrically opposite purpose in mind: to differentiate themselves from the other countries of the continent, lumped together as excessively "tropical" and "violent". The iceberg was a way of shedding the dreadful public image of Chile as a land of tyranny and sorrow, poverty and backwardness, and project instead a cool country, a country far from even the whiff of a banana republic, a country that was efficient and calculating and rational, a country that you could trust. A country, say, like Australia – which was often quoted as the model to which Chile should aspire, as the land that Chile had, in the benighted minds of its entrepreneurs, miraculously already become.

Shades of Sarmiento, here we go again, yesterday is tomorrow.

Let me confess that I adored the zaniness of the project, its confidence (not misplaced, by the way) in the capacity of Chileans to autonomously invent the technology that could keep the iceberg from melting in the torrid frying pan of the European summer, let me concede that I adored how unconventional and utopian this adventure was. But even if I found this break with the past and the traps of nostalgia to be refreshing, that does not mean I was unable to simultaneously recognize how the iceberg marketing strategy was also, either overtly or covertly, conceived as a way to avoid any mention of the recent dictatorial past. Wasn't the amnesiac ice of Antarctica attempting to obliterate the pain left over from the Pinochet era, foes and friends of the tyrant supposedly coming together around the desire to sell Chile and Chilean goods abroad? And it was suspicious that the image-makers of the new Chile had chosen as their symbol the only piece of the national territory that had never been occupied by previous inhabitants – or by any other living human, for that matter. An iceberg as a projection of the desires for

the future cheerfully sidestepped the dilemma of how to integrate those indigenous troublemakers into the imagined community of the fatherland, erasing not only their presence but the challenge that they predicate. I could see the globalized ghost of Sarmiento silhouetted inside the iceberg, again civilization and technology offering themselves to conquer wild nature, again predicting a Latin America that would work wonderfully well if it were not for those irritating primitive anti-modern inhabitants and their present-day defenders, so let's simply make believe they are not there, right? And the same questions coming up, yet again, as they have during our almost two hundred years of Independence, an answer to those questions even more urgent in an interconnected global marketplace where the poorer lands control their fate even less than they did in the past, the same questions: Did we need, do we need, in order to build a free and prosperous future, to make a clean and icy break with the past? In times such as these, what holds a nation together? Can it be the past, if that past has led to so many frustrations and false starts, is an incessant source of instability and divisions? Isn't it better to forge the nation's identity by fixing our eyes on where we are going, a shining and radically different future, a future that turns us into a country like – what else? - like Australia? Isn't it better to turn the page, forget the laments and the suffering, start all over again, as if we were Columbus himself about to sight the trees full of silver of Puerto Plata, but this time get it right, this time learn from our mistakes? Wouldn't a renascent Sarmiento suggest the same solution all over again, is there any alternative way to catch up, now that it's the internet and the global economy and the cell phone and cyberoptic cable that will allow us to join the virtual concert of nations?

Perhaps I should grant Sarmiento himself a rejoinder to that question. Because his **Facundo** is not only noteworthy for having so starkly outlined a drastic solution to the mystery of Latin America's economic and political miscarriages. A closer look at the text itself reveals its author's deep ambiguity about his own central thesis. While preaching unity, Northern decorum and refined harmony, his masterpiece itself is monstrous, a romantic mixture of all possible genres, from history to fiction, from journalism to drama, from diatribes to sociological analysis to biography, a hodgepodge of conflicting narratives that do not conform to any European classification. His book itself is a cracked and fragmented mirror which inadvertently reflects, as it struggles not to fall apart, the very continent that it is, to all appearances, submitting to judicious control. And Sarmiento's best writing subtly celebrates the very barbaric forces he would destroy and subdue. He is fascinated by the excessive marvels – **Qué maravilla!** - of the infinite pampas, a majestic lightening storm, the vast and frightful horizons, the tiger that hunts down men and is hunted by them in return, the extraordinary lives of the machos who populate the plains, trackers and scouts and cattle herders and guides and warriors. In short, Sarmiento is in love with the wild – perhaps because he somehow grasps that the backlands are what confer upon him his identity as an American, those distinct characteristics which anchor him as forever different and deviant from European normalcy, the peculiar and anguishing crossroads that make him, let us say, marketable in the civilized world he so wishes to join, the troubling fact that his existence is deeply wedded to that turbulent beauty and tempestuous violence. He may yearn for the salons of Paris and the railroads of England and the textile mills of Massachusetts, but he views his own urgent intellectual task as joining the two contradictory halves of his land, the two antagonistic zones of his own being, writing as a heroic way of confederating in a text what reality has irretrievably split asunder, his written words anticipating and pointing the way to a hybrid solution, a mestizo bringing together of disparate elements into something neither entirely European nor pre-Columbian. So Sarmiento projects Latin America as a space in between.

If history back then, in the middle of the dangerous disorder of the nineteenth century, did not allow room for that sort of experiment, that quest for a way in which a divided Latin America could meet and mingle and hold together in a novel way, could it be possible that now, at this special moment in the history of the planet when democracy has been given a second breath, is it not conceivable that we might now be ready to build from that reciprocal give and take a new way of engaging the old dilemma of our continent, create Latin America as a beautifully bastardized mixture that would arise out of a dialogue with the submerged zones of our reality?

It is true that one must be cautious, wary of not trying to win with highly charged literary words the moral victory that has been denied to us on the battlefields of history. When I look upon the self-delusion of our governments who, while blindly proclaiming that their neo-liberal ideas are fresh and original, are merely repeating one more time the formulas of the past, when I see the financial and social debt we have accumulated, when I see the rampant corruption, when I see the United States poised to intervene yet one more time in the jungles of Colombia as it has done in so many jungles and beaches and deserts of Latin America in the past, when I see how we once again lag behind and once again hear the same voices indicting our culture, our races, our diversity, our chaos, as if we were cursed by our diversity and internal differences instead of being blessed by them, let me admit that I find it hard not to despair.

On the other hand, in the last decade, a vast social movement has been shaking Latin America and at the same time shaking the very assumptions upon which the national consensus has been built, and this encourages me to be faintly hopeful.

The most well-known of these movements is certainly the uprising in Chiapas, where subcomandante Marcos and the indigenous people who have accepted him as one of their own have gone beyond the perilous trappings of martyrdom and, I hope, nostalgia as well. But there are many other less publicized groups, just as sophisticated and compelling, that are spreading across the reaches of what was once the Inca Empire, with a particularly potent collective network of indigenous activists in Ecuador and Bolivia. In Brazil, the MST (the Landless Peasant Movement) has mobilized millions of landless peasants in a quest for land and also for a different way of producing food. In my own Chile, nobody today would dare to articulate the senseless idea that that Mapuches do not exist. During the last years, the faraway sons and daughters of Caupolicán have demanded language rights, autonomy, land, demanded memory in fact, in ways that would have astounded Nicanor Plaza and the Committee that selected his faux-statue to represent the Araucanian present and past. I could go on about Guatemala and Peru and Panama and Venezuela. . .

What is most interesting about these movements is that they are attempting to step outside the Sarmiento paradigm, the Sarmiento debate in which Latin America has become embroiled— in which my own remarks have been, in fact, entangled all along. These new movements swell out of a new Indian experience of the world without understanding this as an impossibly pure and authentic millenarist archetype antagonistic to modernity. These Indians see themselves rather as absolutely contemporary, already participating in the global system but from another set of values and another source of wisdom, positing an alternative to globalization on its present scale and model but using all the newest technologies and instruments available. And this braces them to be the engine of an array of other movements representing those

marginalized by the ruling classes of Latin America, with needs and interests as vast as our own flora and fauna and where women are particularly concerned protagonists. Can these movements seriously affect the way in which Latin America will imagine and recompose its destiny? I have no crystal ball, but the American C.I.A., in a report about the state of the world in the year 2015, warns that the resurgence of indigenous movements across the Earth— precisely in those areas where the major sources of the planet's energy are situated - is one of the most troubling aspects of what the immediate future might bring. And am I, this perennial trouble-maker, to doubt the intelligence experts of the United States?

Or will our future always reflect the past? Does holding together inevitably mean, in Latin America and elsewhere, that those who do not fit must be sacrificed, must be left to die? Is that the price every successful nation in our times must pay for its unity, for its very success, for leaving the past behind? Is that the secret cost of becoming truly modern? Is it hopelessly naïve and idiotically optimistic to suggest that there might be an alternative? Or are we fated to repeat over and over again the same scenarios of self-delusion that have failed in the past? Will we always be as divided as we were when all this started, back in 1492?

For my part, I am hesitant to be excessively prophetic, given that, shadowed and who knows if mocked by Sarmiento, I live in the overdeveloped United States, far from the continent I am supposedly representing. But I continue to be thankful that I was given a chance to listen to the drowned voices of history, the dead and repressed and hopeful voices of our history. This aging adult who was once a child of twelve closer to **The Last of the Mohicans** than to the first of the Chileans, who did not even know how to pronounce the name of Caupolicán, who was himself blind to his heritage, fell in love with the turbulent variety of Latin America and with the outcasts of its history, and has never felt anything but joy at the experience.

I am convinced that only if that variety is celebrated as our ultimate resource, our **maravilla de las maravillas**, will we be able to escape the curse of our history, go beyond the polarity of Civilization and Barbarism that Sarmiento trapped himself in, trapping us along with him, only then will this celebration of our own people allow us to start creating nations of a different sort, nations that are ravishingly beautiful monsters made from all the disparate strands of our being, nations that are finally not afraid to look themselves in the mirror and smile.

Ariel Dorfman
Sydney, Australia, November, 2001.