



## When September was four again

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Source: English Studies in Latin America, No. 25 (July 2023)

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ISSN 0719-9139

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# WHEN SEPTEMBER WAS FOUR AGAIN

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This is what it feels like, she says lying in bed.

What hope tastes like too, perhaps.

A thirst in the back of the mouth,

gums dry and humming

suddenly feeling it all slip away,

the dull ache in the back of the knees

from standing, from jumping with the others, who are not pacos, who are not mummies, who are not heard. Tears in the eyes. She rolls over, sits and stares.

That night, a tension dripping from the cool night air, like always in this place, thick greasy air of winter.

Crowds, drums and crowds, endless laughter, cries, fear and hope. Chela, chela, chela.

A cathedral to be built on the alameda, vast and skeletal

with blazen lights to draw us in, towers, music for the soul

walking in teaming thousands from dignidad to

the hotel mercure, half a million, a dropped pin on the downtown map

torn out again, no signal before you feel it,

to please the pilgrims to the antiteatro on the hill

flaming their flags for the cameras

the media among them, beneath their camera hoods, whispering into lapel mics forbidden, natural things.

Telling us how to think tomorrow, so that our guard would drop today, sept. 4th

telling us that if we feel today, means nothing tomorrow

or the day after, or the day after than when you start to feel nothing, nothing at all, and go back to work. Bills to pay. Hope to wain. Pain to pass.

No blood spilled that day, except in the grinding of teeth

and the spit in the morning sink, the tired eyes and worn-out smiles

of those hard at work, the Left, the vision, the Left, the dream

the hubris, last-minute decisions up at night,

the heel of the shoe, broken out of step,

lurching from right to left like a drunken sailor, bigger than the city on the coast

the port town, and here a generation of optimists, of those with memories

of the young and old, the queer and poor, the found and lost

the dissidents who won't compromise

who wrote, they say, wish list politics.

It's gone to the dogs, barking at the car horns

barking her way home

down wide one way streets

in this corridor with no apparent exit.

She tallest of souls, built a church  
as vast as the house of anima,

that may fall or may simply

keep growing, never to be bound again

never to touch the tainted soil in its dull and dullest tones

of business ethics or security or national pride or flag waving

chest thumping, eye swivelling. Better that way.

Because this republic is a port town of cranes and commerce,

no bordellos, no streets of dreams,

no sweethearts, love or sorrow, only meat on the grill, beer in the cooler

a nation of poets, a pocket of poets, stitched up,

filing away their lives in fuente de sodas.

247 broken promises before the day is up,

each article bound in scrawled

dogeared pages, sitting useless in the pocket,

the kiosk or the pirate's mat on the sidewalk. Health. Water. Hope.

An innocent bystander on the corner, an outsider

pours down the lens, warm and generous smiles gone to waste

like so much stale thought and a population locked in

service. A glass ceiling glistening above the Mapocho

and a torrid highway beneath his feet, bubbling like

beer in the belly, that which keeps him up at night,

dreaming, an act he doesn't recall the taste of,

days spent without it now, tasting only gut rot on his breath,

no politics or religion in the evening, only everything else.

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The dark glasses of carabineros

reflect the cordillera, the last boundary he

cannot cross.

In dreams he hurls his body over the cerros time and again,

as if jumping through fire

as if dumping a boy in the Mapocho,

easy enough to do when you know you'll get away with it

and the state watches on, machinery in place

and it is built on this ground

and the schools turn their backs

and it is built on this ground

and the animita is built on this ground

where blood has been spilled.

The stage is set. That day, or perhaps the days before, the president's brother is beaten in the street.

She calls me from the rigging beneath the stage, where the water canon almost cannot reach. Bottles and bricks in the air, briefly, before the salty water of the guanaco puts them out of action.

She thinks back to how it started. A straw hat was passed around

and all the parties put in their share, spare change, Lavamax tokens kicking around the dash, their family photos from the mantel piece, medallitas of beaten silver. It is, somehow, enough.

They buy a candle or two, a card with the maria or some other imported saint, printed in China, candles of desperation, not romance. Somehow, it seems enough.

Hoping, that is, that the light does not go out so quickly,

that is burns long enough to crumble into ash. They muddy themselves in the ashes, in this country it is a crime to be anything but rich.

Fumbling for our slippers if its winter, or sandals if it's not,  
under the bed, hiding, with all the other forgotten things of this country, the antipoems, the CEOs,  
the tattered fabric of world maps redrawn in the king's image.

She wants to dream no more, but to wake.

To kill the king she buries here at her feet with this poem,  
to sleep the good sleep of dead queens and never see this perfect  
sunlight again. Shadow. She wants shadow and grey areas. She wants stony beaches it is drama  
to walk on. To leave the soul where it lays. To rest. To delay the inevitable. She wants to be the  
inevitable. She wants to rest.

On the morning of all it, the 4th

they brought you sandwiches,

cold like the stack of folded paper

locked in a plastic box

in a concrete gym, a school yard

soldiers, silently saluting, their boots dense and shiny

their hands never quite growing up



eyes warmer, more human than the rest of them.

The process works.

Shoulders hunch over tables. Neon lights blaze into the muddy night.

This is a national business. Quiet murmuring, a litany of numbers sounding off by rote.

Keeping peace, restoring order  
their ponytails a misspent youth  
of a young democracy

locked in history repeating itself.