

# **Seven Years Buried Alive and Other Writings**

Biófilo Panclasta

2013

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
The other kind of anarchist history . . . . .	6
Three kinds of prose . . . . .	7
The anarchist as legend . . . . .	7
Acknowledgments . . . . .	8
 <b>Biófilo Panclasta: Life and Destruction</b>	 <b>9</b>
 <b>Biófilo Panclasta Biographical Sketch</b>	 <b>10</b>
 <b>Ten Anecdotes of Biófilo Panclasta</b>	 <b>11</b>
Confusion . . . . .	11
A Bowl of Soup and Off to Jail . . . . .	11
A Dog's Life . . . . .	11
Spitting on the Buyer . . . . .	11
Anarchic Bohemia . . . . .	12
Imprisoned? Again! . . . . .	12
The Libertarian Prisoner: Between Police and Prisoners . . . . .	12
The Fire . . . . .	12
Take Down the Madman . . . . .	12
The Madman and the Clock . . . . .	13
 <b>Writings</b>	 <b>14</b>
 <b>Panclasta's autobiographical notes</b>	 <b>15</b>
 <b>Prisons</b>	 <b>19</b>
 <b>Biófilo Panclasta Speaks</b>	 <b>21</b>
 <b>On the Way</b>	 <b>23</b>
 <b>Crimes Against Thinking</b>	 <b>25</b>
 <b>Red Seed</b>	 <b>27</b>
 <b>Interview with Biófilo Panclasta in El Republicano</b>	 <b>28</b>
 <b>Interview with Biófilo Panclasta in El Gráfico</b>	 <b>31</b>

<b>Red Dawn</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Psychological Sketches of Criollo Revolutionaries</b>	<b>34</b>
Jacinto Albarracín C. . . . .	34
Ramón Bernal Azula . . . . .	34
Pablo E. Mancera . . . . .	34
Juana J. Guzmán . . . . .	35
Escolástico Alvarez . . . . .	35
Abel de Portillo . . . . .	35
Carlos F. León . . . . .	35
Fidedigno Cuellar and Enriqueta de Cuéllar . . . . .	35
Ismael Gómez Alvarez . . . . .	36
Neftali Arce . . . . .	36
Servio Tulio Sanchez . . . . .	36
Juan de Dios Romero . . . . .	36
General Saavedra and Daughter . . . . .	37
Lizandro Candia Q. . . . .	37
Manuel Camargo . . . . .	37
Julia Ruiz . . . . .	37
Baldomero Sanín Cano . . . . .	37
María Cano . . . . .	38
Esteban Rodríguez Triana . . . . .	38
Aníbal Badel . . . . .	38
Tomas Uribe Márquez . . . . .	39
Pacho and Pablo Cote . . . . .	39
Luis A. Roza . . . . .	39
José Maria Olozaga . . . . .	39
Ignacio Torres Giraldo . . . . .	40
Jorge Uribe Márquez . . . . .	40
Julio Buritica G. . . . .	40
Pacho Valencia . . . . .	40
Jose Gonzalo Sánchez . . . . .	41
Juan Bautista Villafañe . . . . .	41
Juan de Dios Gutiérrez Iregui . . . . .	41
Alberto Pulido . . . . .	41
Julio Campo Vásquez . . . . .	41
Jorge Madero . . . . .	42
Armando Solano . . . . .	42
Felipe Lleras Camargo . . . . .	42
Abel Botero . . . . .	42
Gabriel Chávez C. . . . .	43
Efraim de la Cruz . . . . .	43
Jaime Barrera Parra . . . . .	43
Leonilde Riaño . . . . .	43
J... Nieto . . . . .	44

Me! . . . . .	44
<b>I Do Not Rectify, I Ratify</b>	<b>45</b>
Statement to Judge Lombana . . . . .	45
<b>My Prisons, My Exiles, My Life</b>	<b>47</b>
Without Prologue . . . . .	47
Epiphany . . . . .	48
Pariahs of the Law: Voices of the Desert? . . . . .	49
<b>Seven Years Buried Alive in a Gomezuelan Dungeon</b>	
<b>The Horrifying Story of a Man Revived</b>	<b>53</b>
Deflowering Memory . . . . .	53
Valencia . . . . .	54
Abandon All Hope! . . . . .	55
Valencia Prison . . . . .	56
Black Dawn . . . . .	58
The Mass Grave . . . . .	61
Hunger! . . . . .	62
Escape! . . . . .	64
Trina Jiménez . . . . .	65
The Monster Fell . . . . .	68
<b>Renaissance</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Interview with Biófilo Panclasta by Rafael Gómez Picón</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>On the Way</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>On the Way! From La Mesa</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Letter to Alfonso López Pumarejo (II)</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Remembering the Past</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Poems</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>Ephemera</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>And Dreams of Ambition</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>What Colombia Is Like</b>	<b>93</b>

<b>Writings About Biófilo Panclasta</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>B. Rosales de la Rosa: Letter to Biófilo Panclasta</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Juan el Cruzado: Death to Biófilo Panclasta!</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Biófilo Panclasta</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>J.A. Osorio Lizarazo: Biófilo Panclasta, the Colombian Anarchist, Friend and Comrade of Lenin, Who Knew the Horrors of the Siberian Steppe</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Gonzalo Buenahora: Biófilo Panclasta in Barrancabermeja</b>	<b>104</b>
Biófilo interviewed by Felipe . . . . .	104
<b>Iván Darío Alvarez: For Bió-filo: The Gardener of the Desert</b>	
<b>For Pan-clasta: The Flutist of a Legend</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>The Man who Proposed the Assassination of Two Emperors, Three Kings, and Two Archbishops is in his Death Agonies in Barranquilla</b>	<b>112</b>
Biófilo Panclasta tried to take his own life for the second time, after denying God for the Hundredth . . . . .	112
<b>Testimonies about Biófilo Panclasta</b>	<b>114</b>

# Introduction

## The other kind of anarchist history

We are nearly certain that this is the first English-language collection of writings by and about the Colombian anarchist Biófilo Panclasta. We took on the task of compiling and translating it because we find him a complex and fascinating figure. For some, it would be enough of a justification to invoke the still little-known history of anarchism in Latin America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and to say that we were adding one more proper name and a few events to Anglophone understanding of that history. But that is not really what moved us to translate these texts.

Like Biófilo, we claim a Nietzschean inheritance. One of the philosopher's essays discusses the ways in which history can strengthen, or weaken, one's life. We invoke it here because we often feel that the current wave of anarchist publications and republications, not to mention translations, contributes to historical understanding in the weakening sense. With each exciting and ultimately tragic narrative, we learn once more that anarchism is a thing of the past. Without meaning to, our erstwhile attempts to rescue an inspiring history for ourselves have the opposite effect. There is more than sarcasm in the accusation one sometimes overhears, that some anarchists of today are nostalgic for the capitalism of the late nineteenth century, or the States of the time before World and Cold Wars militarized all social space. Our sad comrades have so burdened themselves with anarchist history, fragmented and incomplete though it may be, that it seems they think better in hundred-year old-terms and theories than in anything of the present, let alone the future! Well, if we have learned a Nietzschean lesson in what kind of history harms, and what kind heals or strengthens, the proof will be in the book that follows.

There are many standard histories of anarchist ideas, of something called "anarchism", and more often than not there are courageous but somewhat predictable historical figures who may be pointed to as their proponents or followers. It is no different with histories of Latin American anarchism, translated or not. As some of us have always known, and others of us are only now beginning to discover, there is also another kind of history, of *anarchists*, strange and solitary individuals whose lives intersect with anarchist movements and theory only in oblique ways. We usually find such individuals on the egoist or individualist pole of the anarchist continuum, but it should immediately be added that there were and are plenty of egoists and individualists who could also be called, straightforwardly, proponents or followers of a doctrine. They do not surprise us. Panclasta and a few others do. (Panclasta made this clear throughout his life; the most explicit written version of his disavowal of all doctrines is in the series of letters from jail written in 1910, with which our selection begins.)

This is not to rehearse some kind of simplistic argument against organizing or organizations. Like some individualists, Panclasta fought alongside organized groups when he saw fit; he also knew how to part ways when it was time, answering to no greater cause than the desire to wander again (which often meant, to escape from the cell he was put in for fighting!). In 1928, at

a peak of organizational intensity in Colombia and throughout Latin America, he even tried founding his own organization. It seems that they published a manifesto, and not much else happened. All of this is to note that a more anarcho-syndicalist or communist history of Latin American anarchism would completely miss Biófilo, or treat him as a curiosity, precisely for the reasons that we consider him to be a timeless figure.

### Three kinds of prose

Panclasta's own writings were by and large incidental. He was neither a theorist of anarchism nor a consistent chronicler of his own life. The pieces gathered here under his own name can be divided into three types. Some are pithy, almost aphoristic, quick sketches that would have been common in a time when the newspaper and the pamphlet were the best instruments of propaganda. The prize piece in this style is probably "Psychological Sketches of Criollo Revolutionaries," wherein Panclasta draws up a diagnostic balance-sheet of the character of his fellow Colombian agitators. (We hesitated about including this composition, since neither we nor, we suppose, most of our readers will have heard of these figures. We opted for using it when we realized how effective the style is despite lack of familiarity with those described. A similar sketch is included as part of *Seven Years Buried Alive*.) A second sort of prose is that of his letters. Although they are addressed to individuals, Biófilo seems to have been conscious that sitting down to compose them and gather his thoughts was a chance to share emotions and ideas in thoughtful detail, not just with those individuals but with posterity. Even when he writes to judges or presidents, his intentions are clear. (See "I do not rectify, I ratify" for an example.) The third sort of writing, of which the best example is his book *Seven Years Buried Alive*, is characterized by a torrentially dense prose, full of exotic words and turns of phrase. Panclasta turned to this expressive (sometimes purple) prose when it came time to talk about the most intense emotions—or the most horrible memories. Here the influence is less journalistic or epistolary and more that of a decadent late Romanticism. It is clear that, for a man who was not a writer by profession but out of necessity, Panclasta reached for every tool, every style he could to say what had to be said. He blended them, and made each his own. (From a translation point of view, it is interesting to note that this project had us consulting the dictionary much more than usual. Aside from his neologisms, Panclasta distributes equal portions of Colombian slang and archaic Spanish words throughout his prose.)

We have also included several interviews from throughout his life, which, aside from colorful stories, give some sense of his engaging and unpredictable manner of speaking. In the eyes of the Colombian editors of his works, these are probably the most reliable sources for factual information about his life. Even so, they also contain exaggerations and fabrications. This brings us to the last topic.

### The anarchist as legend

It is difficult, if not impossible, to separate fact from fiction in Panclasta's life story. What we know for sure can be summed up rather briefly, and is included in the "Timeline" section of our collection. Here, for our own sake as well as his, we should be concerned more with him as a *figure*. Reading through these selections, it is easy enough to notice how a factual story

slips into an exaggeration, an exaggeration into a misunderstanding or rumor, and from there to something on the order of a myth or a legend. We think that this process, the creation of *the anarchist as legend*, is part of what our collection challenges us to think about. Of course, it is key that Biófilo himself did not set out to become a legend (he did not choose his name, but accepted it when it was offered). He set out to live his own life in whatever way he saw fit, improbable though it may have seemed in his time and place. If *anarchist* meant anything in his context, anything more than an adherent to a certain strain of syndicalism or communism or the general anti-establishment sentiment of vague mottos like ‘equality’, it must have meant something like: one who insisted on living his own life, even to the point of becoming a legend.

It is important to recall that, for anarchists of the nineteenth century, anti-clericalism was as key a component of their theory and practice as anti-statism. If the State was the clear designation of all of the apparatuses of brute force and violence with their bureaucratic managers and ornate figureheads, it was the Church that stood in for the vast and murky realm of the governance of everyday life: moral codes, rituals, and stultifying myths that confused free thinking and action about even the smallest affairs. For Panclasta the onetime altar boy, nothing was more obvious than the relation between the imposition of myth at an early age and a lifetime wedded to convention. To break with religious belief and moral codes was, in effect, to live one’s own life in such a way that one might even become a legend. All options were open (they still are).

That is why we are not terribly concerned with the inmixture of fact and fiction in the pieces included here. From the point of view of a doctrinaire anarchism, Biófilo Panclasta was clearly an *impure* figure. From his own point of view, he probably was more interested in where adventure would take him next than in whether, in his own time or in some nightmarish future, he would be judged and found wanting.

## Acknowledgments

Our Spanish texts come from two sources:

*Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano.* Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural “Alas de Xué”, 1992.

To this collection we owe most of our book, including the titles for some of the pieces the texts “Life and Destruction” and “Biographical Sketch.”

*Siete años enterrado vivo.* Web publication in pamphlet form by Indubio Pro Reo (Caracas) / Publicaciones CorazónDeFuego (Medellín), n.d.

This free web publication provided us with the text of *Seven Years Buried Alive*, which the editors of *El eterno prisionero* confessed was impossible for them to track down.

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# Biófilo Panclasta: Life and Destruction

Biófilo Panclasta, more than a man, is a way of being, of thinking, of acting, of feeling, of loving, of hating, of killing.

He is the synthesis of the contradiction of everything we carry within. Who has not felt the deep desire to kill, to raze, to destroy everything?

Each of us carries a Biófilo Panclasta within, some more Biófilos than Panclastas, other more Panclastas than Biófilos. His being moves between two irresolvable contradictions: life and death, yours and mine.

Arrogant, intrepid, adventurous, with oracular language in the best Nietzschean style, he broke brains open and pulverized obsolete systems. He is Zarathustra descending from the mountain to bring light, to shake the world. With loquacious and convincing language he left no idol standing. His god is in him, he is his own path, his only reason for being, his only cause, “I am I”, he has neither sect nor flag, he is a freed, egoist spirit, he proposes nothing because he affirms nothing. He was not born to catechize, he repudiates governing and being governed alike; he follows no one and wants no one to follow him, he acts as he feels. His originality is to imitate himself—that is why he is considered the “ideal type” of the anarchist.

We have relied on what information we found to reconstruct the itinerary of this life, of this voice that prisons and exile could not silence. We hope that, one day, we will be able to fill in the places and times of his action that are left blank in this itinerary of struggle and suffering.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Originally “Biófilo Panclasta: Vida y Destrucción” in *Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural “Alas de Xué”, 1992.

# Biófilo Panclasta Biographical Sketch

**Introduction** *Biófilo introduces Panclasta*

**Favorite virtue** *Struggle*

**Most hated vice** *Obedience*

**Aversion** *Juan Vicente Gómez*

**Favorite writer** *Kropotkin*

**Heroine** *Heliófila*

**Color** *Red*

**Drink** *Chicha*

**Occupation** *Adventurer*

**What is most important** *Life*

**Ideal** *Justice*

**Ethics** *Aesthetics*

**Most hated country** *Venezuela*

**Most loved country** *Argentina*

**Slogan** *Equality*

**Favorite maxim** *To love is to understand*

**Problem** *Colombia*

**Motto** *To love life and destroy everything*

**Philosopher** *Nietzsche*

**Cause** *My own*

**Duty** *To show truth in its nakedness*

**Colombians** *Pariahs of the law*

**Advice** *Each must be his own path*

**Religion** *Individualism*

**Proposal** *Nothing*

**Origin** *The world*

**Marital status** *Free*

**Scent** *Sandalwood*

**The right he demands** *To commit crime*

**Lover** *Fire*

**Profession** *Destroyer*

**Revolution** *I am the revolution<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Originally “Biófilo Panclasta: Semblanza sobre su vida” in *Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural “Alas de Xué”, 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# **Ten Anecdotes of Biófilo Panclasta**

## **Confusion**

He returns from Italy to Holland to attend an anarchist congress convened by Prince Kropotkin in Amsterdam. At the same time, in The Hague, there is a Peace Convention, to which the Colombian government, presided over by General Reyes, had sent Santiago Pérez Triana as a delegate. He was a fancy bourgeois from Zipaquirá.

As soon as the anarchist congress was underway, it was shut down by the Dutch police and our friend Panclasta was sent to prison with no tulips. The news was reported in somewhat garbled fashion by European newspapers; it arrived in Bogotá translated as: “Colombian delegate imprisoned in Holland.” When the news reached President Reyes, he almost had a stroke. He ordered his chancellor to protest in the strongest terms for this assault on national honor, civilized customs, and international treaties. The Dutch government, somewhat confused about all the noise, had no other recourse but to free Biófilo, who right away packed up his bags. Destination: Russia.

## **A Bowl of Soup and Off to Jail**

In Bogotá, where there is supposed to be an unstoppable socialist tendency, he showed up, shaking with hunger, at the inn of a propagandist; he asked for dinner, thinking that by merely saying his name he would earn any favor with an appeasing smile, but he didn’t even get the apostle to sacrifice a plate on the altar of ideas, and he had to resign himself to a few days’ sentence.

## **A Dog’s Life**

One day, in Güepsa, in Santander, he came across a woman drowning some mangy dogs, because she could not keep them. He snatched them up and led them to the hotel, where he fed them.

“Hit me or have them take me to jail; at least these animals will die with less hatred for people.”

## **Spitting on the Buyer**

In Argentina he was offered, through an eminent man, a well-salaried post to stop his political agitations. He turned it down jovially, and a day later he passed by the guy’s house, escorted by a guard, for having been found delivering an impassioned speech to the May strikers.

## **Anarchic Bohemia**

Biófilo Panclasta was carried to the prison on Thursday night. He was drunk and he would not pay twenty-five cents for a bottle of liquor. But Biófilo Panclasta was not in the habit of paying for liquor; and this is simply because he does not have any money with which to pay for it. And drunkenness is a state that is part of his personality as a drinker and beggar.

What was serious in all this is that he went to the *presidio* ten times in three months, all for the same reason: drunkenness and failure to pay for the liquor he drank. According to the regulations of the Police Code, this repeated offense placed Biófilo Panclasta among the bums. Unfortunately, Bucaramanga has made this discovery too late. It can no longer be sensational.

## **Imprisoned? Again!**

“In Ibabué, Señor Biófilo Panclasta has been confined to prison. The reasons are unknown.”

## **The Libertarian Prisoner: Between Police and Prisoners**

March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1942, Biófilo Panclasta died for the last time in an old folks' home in Pamplona.

This man, who “wandered” between jails and billy clubs around the world, ironically ended up thinking that the only ones who had taken mercy on him in his agony were the police officers.

The idea never crossed his libertarian mind that those who carried his inert body to the cemetery would be prisoners: his universal companions.

Biófilo's burial was well attended, and the coffin was taken to the cemetery on the shoulders of prisoners. It is not currently known if he has any family.

## **The Fire**

After his long journey in Asia and Europe, Biófilo Panclasta arrived in Bucaramanga dressed in an old cloth suit, a white shirt, and white pants that had been a gift from his occasional companion, Rasputin. In his luggage he brought German copies of *Capital* and *The Holy Family* by Marx, signed by Lenin. He brought them tied together in a bag as proof of his friendship with the leader of the Russian Revolution. It is said that these books were burned by Father Adolfo García Cadena after the death of the eternal prisoner.

## **Take Down the Madman**

One Holy Thursday, Monsignor Rafael Afanador y Cadena and his whole procession of the faithful were devotionally bearing the flagellated Lord to the tomb when suddenly, Biófilo Panclasta appeared on the balcony of Casa Anzóategui and pronounced a radical anarchist speech against religion and priests. His last words were “ignorant adorers of stick and plaster figures” and “religion is the opiate of the people.” The Monsignor and his procession turned their Our Fathers and Holy Maries into desperate shouts of “He's a madman, take him down from there!” and “He's drunk, to prison with him!”

## The Madman and the Clock

People in Pamplona say that in the final days of his life, Biófilo Panclasta was escaping the old folks' home and, with much pain and difficulty, climbing the church tower. Once there, with shaking hands and a nostalgic gaze, he withheld the movement of the clock's hands, which so carefully marked the passage of time. The people looked, and said mechanically: "It's that crazy Biófilo again, trying to stop time!"

Biófilo was good for everything. It's also said that the mothers of Pamplona fattened up their boys with the threat: "if you don't eat your soup, I'm calling Biófilo".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural "Alas de Xué", 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# Writings

## Panclasta's autobiographical notes

Señor Aurelio de Castro

I received your letter. Thank you. To be listened to is to be understood. Hiding a prisoner is like hiding a spark. Whatever you throw on it to conceal it, with time, which dries it all up, will only serve as fuel.

The mere fact of addressing these questions to me is already a favor. To know is to judge. And therefore I gratefully answer you:

I was born in Chinácota, Cúcuta Province, on October 26, 1879. My family name was Vicente R. Lizcano, for which I substituted my current name in 1904.

I saw almost all the countries of Europe, but in a very superficial way. Due to the persecutions I suffered, the fear which everything adventurously new stirs up in the spirits of the weak, my sorry economic situation, and even the difference of opinions with my associates, I was prevented from traveling as anything other than a fugitive.

In spite of this, I can judge the general state of things in France, Spain, England, Switzerland, Italy, Belgium and Holland. I studied their factories, meetings, strikes and social movements. And, my artistic temperament notwithstanding, that is what I did with the time I had left given prison, exile and beastly miseries.

Among the revolutionaries I met, for his global importance, I will cite prince Kropotkin, author of the most wonderful work of scientific imagination and erudition that has recently been published. It is entitled *Mutual Aid*.

Also, Elisée Reclus, who explored the eastern regions of the Guajira Peninsula, Colombia, about which he wrote a work entitled *My Explorations in America*. Reading this book instilled in many Spanish workers the idea of coming to settle in Colombia. They gave up on their desires when they learned of Reyes' decree prohibiting individuals of a radical mind from entering the country.

I met Grave, author of *The Moribund Society and Anarchy*.

I met Malato, author of *The Philosophy of Anarchism*.

I met Sébastien Faure, Leverine, and Tanvién.

I met Lerroux and Ferrer, whose letters I showed to Dr. José Francisco Insignares on January 25, 1908 and in which they said that the Spanish government was obligated to expel me by demand of the Colombian government.

I met Gori and Malatesta, Ferri and Furati.

But realize that with almost all of these great revolutionaries I had a clear disagreement.

"I am not an anarchist," I told Kropotkin, "I am I. I do not abandon one religion for another, one party for another, one sacrifice for another. I am a freed, egoist spirit. I do as I feel. I have no cause but my own."

And Malato responded: "Biófilo Panclasta is not an anarchist, but rather a fierce personalist who, not wanting to be dominated by anyone, wants to dominate everyone."

One night, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1907, I was invited by the “Social Studies” group to refute a conference entitled “Anarchy Against Life” given by Bestraud. The orator expounded the same ideas that form my philosophical mentality. I passed the right to speak to Matta and I waited... Once he was finished, I said: “none of you knows what anarchism is; those of you that call yourselves anarchists, are not, and those that don’t, are.” When I left I was sent right to jail.

And everyone was displeased with me because I have the courage to not adapt to any idea or principle. At most I adopt it.

And do not believe that Europe is a global revolutionary focal point. No sir. Argentina: here’s the nation of outlaws.

I arrived there as the eternal *épave*<sup>1</sup>. I have not acquired my ideas through anyone’s influence or book. I connected with the anarchist and socialist youth, I frequented their meetings, I collaborated in their plays, I wrote in their newspapers. And, intimately, many of these revolutionaries went so far as to believe me to be “the ideal type of an anarchist.” But the great social mass did not. My neopagan and artistic soul, my rebellious and individualist temperament, my horror toward multitudes could not instill admiration in this great human *foule* (mass) who have achieved nothing other than having been hurried from the hands of their masters of yesterday into those that today free them to be under their own weight.

And nevertheless, the police of Buenos Aires focused all their attention on me.

For the head of “Social Order” I was the sole originator of a great propaganda of theory and action that was being made in that capital.

In spite of this security force and my refusal to accept “an independent, just and uncompromising employment,” the Argentinian government did not want to expel me for the sole fact of my being South American!

In 1906 the meeting of the “International Congress of Free Thought” was conceived—it was held that same year in Buenos Aires.

The free-thinkers of this city, because every idea fit under this name, began a long series of preparatory sessions with the aim of organizing the program. I attended these, like everyone who attended, with the status of adherent. But so great was the number of great anarchist orators in attendance that the promoters of the Congress, who were simply anti-clerical, had to change the name from “Congress of Freethinkers” to “World Liberal Congress.” Despite this, they met under that title. Not a single revolutionary attended. I left for Europe long before their meeting.

I believe that among the characters of my particular philosophical form, you will not find proselytism. I was not born to catechize. Egoist as I am, I believe it useless to sacrifice myself for anything; To govern is as revolting to me as to be governed; each one must be his own path; I follow no one and I want no one to follow me.

And if I fight with tenacity and heroism; if I have made of my life a challenge against everything despotic, vulgar or small, it is because on this is based the satisfaction of my soul. When I defend another’s infringed-upon right, or save one condemned to suffering, I fight for myself. To help someone does not do anything but satisfy necessities that are as demanding in me as love itself.

Thus I have no “school,” “doctrine,” “party,” “sect,” “duty,” commitments or connections with anything or anyone. I have, like all men, energies, feelings, passions.

My struggle for freedom is nothing but a passion for freedom.

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<sup>1</sup> Seems to be French *épave*, “castaway.”



My love for everything that has life is nothing but a feeling of pleasure, a reflex stretched out toward infinity.

My hatred of tyrants is nothing but the visualized development of the defensive instinct for self-preservation.

Therefore I have always done as I feel.

If there I mingled with the strikers so that they could obtain an improvement in life, it was not because I was a striker, but because through situational affinity, I understood their cause. And to love is to understand.

If further I mixed with the republicans (of Spain you understand), if another time with the socialists, if here with the “anarchists,” it was not for any reason but acting in obedience to a suggestive imperative, as Nietzsche would say.

And what do you deduce from all this?

That the question which you address to me as to a “sectarian” I answer as a skeptic: I do not believe or affirm anything. I live. Obedient to fate, I work with and help her. Can I be a propagandist when I lack faith? Consequently, I propose nothing.

A temperament as revolutionary and as restless as mine, aroused by a thousand persecutions and miseries had to, due to moral reaction, turn all its energy against the weight of atavism that chains my action.

And since that atavism has in its external manifestations the forms of the nature that transmitted it, I attributed everything bad about my humanicidal and cruel education to Colombia. And I set all my energies to the thought of freedom, to libertarian awareness.

I thought of dedicating myself in Bogotá to combative and artistic journalism. Art and Freedom. That is my journalistic program. The revolution for art and art for art’s sake is not a non sequitur but rather a confirmation of the skeptical combatant.

As a gift to Colombia, in spite of my “anarchism,” I thought of attracting to myself the divine lightning of Olympic fury that only illuminates in destroying. And I will conclude by listing each time I’ve returned to Colombia and the reason for it.

January 1901. I came to Cúcuta as a protest against neutrality in the war.<sup>2</sup> They even tried to execute me.

November 1904. I entered Barranquilla to offer my services in defense of the nation. I was named in Bogotá—without pay you understand—First Assistant General of the 4<sup>th</sup> “Panama expedition”.<sup>3</sup>

Accused of conspiracy, I left by land and on foot to Ecuador, to which I offered my services in their planned war with Peru.

January 1908. Exiled from Spain at Reyes’ request, I arrived in Puerto Colombia with the aim of continuing on to Bogotá, not in order to kill the dictator as they say, but rather with the aim of observing his work.

May 1908. The same gentleman had me expelled from Panama where I had taken refuge, and had the authorities of Panama deliver me as a prisoner to those of El Chocó.

November 1909. In Central America I announce the appearance of a periodical entitled *El Anticristo*. And, with the aim of founding it, I went to Cartagena. The governor, De la Vega, kid-

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<sup>2</sup> The Thousand Days’ War (1899–1902), a civil war between the right- and left-wing parties in Colombia.

<sup>3</sup> To fight off the plans of the United States to create and control the Panama Canal, which was at that time contested territory of Colombia.

napped me on a German steamer, threw me in the hatch, and put me on another ship, requesting that the authorities of Colon imprison me.

December 1909. Aiming to evade the effects of a recourse to habeas corpus that I presented to the Supreme Court of Panama, the police stowed me on a boat and had me taken to Colombian territory, where they abandoned me. The executioner returning the expiatory victim to the denaturalized mother.

In conclusion then, I am in Colombia because Panama wanted it that way, and because I, as one who falls into water will struggle to save himself, struggled to save my dignity from a deleterious moral atmosphere that suffocates our soul, nullifying our character, our will and whatever might be noble.

Finally, pardon these poorly strung together lines, sketched with very good will but in a state of soul that cannot think: I am sick.

I salute you,

*Biófilo Panclasta*

*In the police quarters of Barranquilla, April 15, 1910.*

P.S. I haven't even read over what I wrote because, having a thousand difficulties sending correspondence, I wanted to take advantage of the sole occasion that I have to do it. Correct or interpret what is missing or incorrect.

*Biófilo.*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Originally an untitled letter. Given the title "Datos Autobiográficos de Panclasta" by the editors of "Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero." Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural "Alas de Xué", 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# Prisons

*(Response from Biófilo Panclasta to B. Rosales de la Rosa.)*<sup>1</sup>

Your beautifully expressed sympathies have come to comfort my spirit in this, the sad solitude of the prisoner.

But it was not the solitude of things that sunk it in its long and nostalgic meditations.

It was the solitude of thought.

Believing oneself a defender without anyone to defend.

A liberator without anyone liberated.

A man of heart among heartless beings.

To feel alone is to feel useless.

Therefore your letter transcends for me, in a very superior way, the kind of fraternal palliative usually shared in times of misfortune.

My suffering has something of greatness.

I am not I who suffers; it is the living and suffering humanity that paints on the sensible canvas of my soul all the sufferings of its uncomprehended misery.

I am not imprisoned by myself.

If I am feared, it is because they know that my word, as the miraculous medicine of a doctor of the soul, can remove from the eyes of the prejudiced the blindfold that keeps them in the land of the “dark barbarians.”

To be persecuted is to be feared.

And I who can teach nothing and preach nothing, I am feared because like the “firefly fleeing from the light, carrying the light, I illuminate the same shadows that I go seeking.”

For me, prison cannot exist.

Like all tyrannies, it is only in the heart of slaves.

I consider my guardians to be beings of a prehistoric nature. And I despise them.

They are too human!

I am not in the habit of making feline madness logical, and I leave its proof to the empire of force; force is the reason of beasts.

As such, even behind walls I believe myself, and am, free.

Free, free as my thought, neither limitless nor incommunicable.

And as this thought is the language of our souls, I send from here, to you, to that place, all the psychic wealth of my evoked feeling as a tribute of reciprocity on the altar of love that the god of Harmony has erected.

We struggle, but we struggle like Prometheus, for being beginnings...

We struggle against death, that Christianity of life.

Let us live.

For life and with it.

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<sup>1</sup> See “A Letter” and “Biófilo Panclasta” by B. Rosales de la Rosa.

Art and freedom.  
That is a path.  
Let us live for ourselves.  
And let us unite, yes, let us unite against everything weak, everything small, everything vile.  
To be a Christian is to be defeated.  
Let us be biófilos (lovers of life).  
Let us be strong. Like crystal. Light and hardness, hardness and light.  
And may others learn.  
Without us teaching. To be a teacher is to be a tyrant. Leave thought out like meat.  
Have no duties. Leave that to the moralists.  
We alone, among those who go alone, let us each walk our path; personally; intensifying life,  
increasing pleasure, feeling existence...  
Living.  
For man is not born but to live.  
And to live is not to suffer.  
Because life is beautiful!  
It can be beautiful!  
Let us make it beautiful!  
Be biófilos!  
Let us be that!  
Cheers!  
*Biófilo Panclasta.*  
*Barranquilla Police Station, April 19, 1910.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Originally an untitled letter. Given the title “Carcelarias” by the editors of “Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero.” Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural “Alas de Xué”, 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# Biófilo Panclasta Speaks

Señor Aurelio de Castro — Presente

Yesterday an issue of your journal passed into my hands and, believe me, your writing surprised me agreeably. Politically, you will understand.

And I tell you I found it strange because your name is known to me as a conservative and to be conservative is to not be a fighter, not an oppositionist, not a rebel.

But Yakaoma has already said it: take a man's freedom away from him and he will turn into the staunchest enemy of slavery.

And it is in this way that I believe an attitude to be sincere. Freedom is a physical state in the political order. To be oppressed is to have the right of not being oppressed. To fight for that is to be a lover of freedom.

On the other hand, the so-called libertarian liberals are nothing but idealists. From fact they make an idea and they run after it as if running after their own shadow.

"Therefore I do not accept parties of theories but rather parties of interests. All those of us who groan under the same weight, even with different ideas and aspirations, have a common cause, that of our freedom and that is why we unite for battle, without any commitment other than victory."

From here, it should not be strange to you that I, officially anarchist, socialist, etc., etc., would address you, of conservative opinion, for I will repeat that there are no conservative men, no liberals. There are only situations of below and situations of above.

And I write you in the name of these very situational interests.

My situation is the same as yours. It is only that mine is more violent.

I find myself imprisoned here, where I was brought from Honda. And I think I will be exiled. Nothing can justify such an assault.

Because in the case of my being an anarchist — which I am not, if by anarchism one understands Ferrerism — not having committed any punishable act, I do not see what excuse the government has to impose against a thinker an imprisonment that it would embarrass even Torquemada.

In Colombia I am not even known as a writer. Not even a single letter has been published in this country from which I have been exiled for thirteen years .

The crime committed against me is in fact not even a crime against the free transmission of thought, but rather a horrific attentat against the possibility of the intention to think.

And it is for this reason that in the name of dignity, of civilization, of the liberatory task of the press, of human, political and journalistic solidarity, I address my voice to request in my case the support that you believe you would solicit, if you found yourself in my circumstances. And in the same spirit I beg of you to come visit me in prison, if it does not go against your sensibility.

I am your attentive, sure, and fellow,

*Biófilo Panclasta*

*Barranquilla, April 11, 1910.*

P.S. Here goes a game of letters...

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<sup>1</sup> Originally an untitled letter. Given the title “Habla Biófilo Panclasta” by the editors of “Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero.” Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural “Alas de Xué”, 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# On the Way

Señor Director of *El Pueblo*,  
Barranquilla.

Awaiting motives, I have delayed this correspondence, since everything that I had to say to you about my departure from there was rather insignificant.

Now, after fifteen days of awful stay in this, "my devil's island," I have received orders to depart for Santo Domingo, the only likely asylum left in my infinite peregrination.

The Vice Consul, Mr. Penso, has done on my behalf everything that his reach has made possible. He procured me passage to Venezuela; but the consul of that republic denied to grant me a passport, at which point the island administration intervened, took matters into their own hands, examined my situation to the point of offense, for threats to bourgeois order, and ordered me to depart for the only country of refuge remaining to me.

So it is that in a very short time I have been distanced some hundreds of miles further from that land all the more beloved the more ungrateful it is. My heart sown there, it will have nothing to do but stretch itself over a space as large as the distance that separates me from Colombia.

And there in the beautiful Quisqueya, as in all places where I have placed my sole, my speech will contain an incandescent sentence against the tyrants and the world one more beach to receive this wave that does not die because it does not find any sand to receive it in its agony.

I go to Santo Domingo as I have gone everywhere: without any resources but the satchel of my ideas and without any weapons but the traveler's staff.

And like the biblical Moses, there also I will strike the rock of the old tyrants and with the bitter water of disillusionment I will let flow my path toward the Calvary that will some day be Tabor.

Because nights are not endless. Suffering is perhaps more inconstant than pleasure, because we can artificialize the latter but not the former. On the other hand, I am neither happier nor more unfortunate than any other. I love life and I feel it. The day it ceases to be true to me, I will destroy it.

People who complain disgust me. To complain is to declare yourself weak. Here, on a table of white marble, intoxicated on the aphrodisiac aroma of red flowers, in a room of warm tropical love, I feel as much the king of myself as deep within a dirty dungeon starving and tortured. Because greatness is not in things, but in the individual.

I do not aspire to the presidency of the republic but I defy anyone who, in the name of that title wishes to dominate me. That is why I have fought and will fight as long as I live in my unshakeable faith in the dignity of existence; I make no compromise with petty weaknesses. That is why I have hated that party of filibusterers of power that are sometimes called Ruribe, sometimes Fernández; they are nothing but slaves of passions as vile as the enjoyment of oppressing others.

If I were to aspire to any party in Colombia, that party would be that of the men and women *psychiarchists*. The greatness of feeling: here I have my only possible aristocracy.

This is not to say that I do not get mixed up in the public affairs of the country. I have been wounded and I defend myself. My exile is a fight without treaty or rest. This is my attitude. *I am the revolution.*

And under this title I elaborate a kind of political-sociological-philosophical program, which, adapting to the country and the ethnic spirit, the conjurers of contemporary thought will allow our youth a daring step from their present morbid conservative state to a phase of the most advanced evolution without waiting on the tiring mediations of the parties that *do things halfway*.

Soon I will send you a descriptive correspondence about this, my latest journey; for now it is not possible for me to extend myself to matters foreign to the strictly political sense of this *petite lettre*.

I hope that you send me your newspaper to Santo Domingo; and I also ask of you all the generous journalists of there and of the country in general. And for my part, I will send you very soon my *Antichrist*, which, with the consent of the authorities, without their consent and in spite of their consent, has to be and will be something more than a ray from Damascus in the path of the defeats en route to San Isidro.

I am the Señor Director's most affectionate and compatriotic servant,

*Biófilo Panclasta*

Curacao, May 8, 1910.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Original title "En marcha..." signed Curacao, May 8, 1910 and published in El Pueblo, Barranquilla, #248, May 21, 1901, page 2. Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, *el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural "Alas de Xué", 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.



# Crimes Against Thinking

Señor Bejamín Palacio Uribe. Bogotá.

I write you from a jungle. From the banks of a river. Under a torrential sky. I have a lot to say. A lot... But my soul is not condensing ideas. My hand is stiff. Great sufferings are untranslatable.

In spite of this, I do not want to miss this first opportunity to let the world know of the nefarious work of which I am victim.

What I want to trace in these lines is not a complaint. Neither is it a protest. I do not believe I am weak, nor do I believe my enemies are *conscious*.

But the act whose consequences I suffer, it is nothing but the work of irrational beings. How to understand it otherwise?

I returned to Colombia, with the guarantee of the promises that the new government had made of opening the doors to all expatriates. I returned with my satchel of ideas and my traveler's staff to knock on the doors of the national conscience, in search of a highest feeling, of a supreme idea of homeland salvation. Because in spite of my anarchic ideas, I too have a homeland, or better yet, a *collective I*, and by my very egoism I must defend myself, defending it.

Soul pregnant with hopes and mind pregnant with energies, I arrived in Colombia like a de-throned Lucifer, hopeful and fiery. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of last November the steamer that brought me from abroad put in at Cartagena. I arrived satisfied and proud.

But how great was my disillusion when a thug barked at me the order to not come "to land"!

"Why?"

To this question, governor De la Vega has answered me it was because Reyes had me exiled from the country before.

"But did he not do so before a decree *allowing* political exiles permission to return to Colombia?"

"Yes, but not for you, because your ideas are a crime!"

Then, as a protest against destiny itself, that very destiny which would obligate me to be born in a country where *thinking* is a crime, I wanted to throw myself into the sea in order to force the governor to be made responsible for an act that he carried out with no conscience.

And in fact I managed to force him into the inquisitorial spectacle of taking me from the ship in a file of executioners, locking me up in a miserable police space.

I was imprisoned but I was victorious. I was in Colombia.

Imprisoned: great. The abuse was in the open. Resplendent injustice.

What would they do with me?

Very soon *Señor De la Vega's lack of conscience* found a way to resolve my situation, which was aggravating his own. In agreement with the German consul and the *Hamburg-America Line Company*, the subsequent day I embarked again on board the *Sardina* and he sent me to Colón, communicating to the police of that port beforehand so that I would be apprehended and thus imprisoned there for the crime of being a patriot; I could not return to Colombia to commit the crime of aspiring to be free.

Colombia delivered me in shackles to Panama. The mother placed me under the traitorous and cowardly executioner's ax.

Is this believable?

No! This is why, in qualifying it, I qualify it as an unconscionable act.

This is why I do not protest, why I do not argue anything. But on the other hand the capitol has to stop being an insane asylum. Reason! The nation is lost for lack of logic.

What happened to me when I arrived in Colón is what you would suppose. Violently seized from the steamer, I was taken to the prison, tortured, vilified. I accused the executive Obaldía to the Supreme Court. Then I was transferred to the capitol. And there *envaulted*. Until one day, December 8, I was taken and thrown in a rotting boat without provisions, which took me to Juradó and abandoned me there. So Panama *avoided* the affront of its crime. So they wanted to kill me by drowning far away, since they lacked the courage to finish me off at close range.

And if I have saved my life, it is a moral biological phenomenon. Five days I went without eating. Twenty in the jungles. Horrifically. Today I leave. I leave for the Atrato River.

My dangers continue. I do not even have the *reward* of sex, but I will keep going. I will keep going there... there... and for then, let the *world* wait: the effort of the citizen who believes he wants to be governed by men...

*Biófilo Panclasta*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1910. Originally an untitled letter. Given the title "Los crímenes contra el pensamiento" by the editors of "Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero." Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, *el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural "Alas de Xué", 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# Red Seed

B. Rosales de la Rosa,  
Barranquilla.

To communicate is to grow. Love is nothing but the unconscious communication of life. And is there anything more *felt* than love?

What is good, Nietzsche said, is the feeling that power grows when a resistance is defeated.

To be great is to be everything. Man *can* be everything. To unite is to become gigantic. To communicate is to fuse together.

To speak in order to express thought is to enhance thought. To express feeling, now by means of words, now by means of the arts, in music, is to broaden the soul toward the limits that expand the capacity of our own psychic potency.

Thought is infinite, but like the force of attraction between bodies, it needs a *repulsive* mass which, balancing tendencies, forms the *neutral* point, which requires another thought's opposition in order to be a force. An idea is but the result of two absolute extremes colliding. The spark of two clouds as they meet.

I do not know if the thinker or the artist need their listeners more than the listeners need them.

Life is a kind of continual enlargement. That cruel struggle that Darwin speaks to us of is the proof. Everyone struggles to become greater. Thus individualism is nothing but the proof of socialism, as egoism is nothing other than that of altruism.

Egoism is determined by the *hunger necessity*, and *breadism* by the love necessity. Why does man feed himself? So as to give life to other beings.

Therefore the individualist anarchist philosophy disgusts me as much as the socialist-conservative one. Both lean to absolute extremes. And man is not only sociable nor only individualistic. Man is the most sociable animal and at the same time the most individualistic. And that is why I do not call myself either an "anarchist" like Mackay nor a communist like Grave. I am *historically* a radical socialist.

As this letter is nothing but the preamble of a series of epistles I will address to you on social-political matters, I will extend myself no further today. For the next occasion, hope that the circumstances will allow me to send them. And now *au revoir*.

Regarding the consequences of my expulsion, I only address to you that I will shortly be expelled from here to Santo Domingo; send me your periodical and what you can to there. For my part, I will send you my *Antichrist*.

Your compatriot,  
*Biófilo Panclasta*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1911. Originally an untitled letter. Given the title "Simiente Roja" by the editors of "Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero." Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural "Alas de Xué", 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# Interview with Biófilo Panclasta in El Republicano

*Biófilo Panclasta, the Colombian anarchist, is in our city. He arrived five days ago. He is currently under arrest in a detention center. He got in a fight with a Philistine and the authorities took a side in the matter. [...]*

*Panclasta is about thirty years old... He is tall, pale, with a thin beard. Lively eyes. He speaks with a good degree of fluidity. His ideas are not well organized. On his forehead, somewhat darkened and disordered in tragic locks, the mane of thoughtful dreamers.*

**Hello, Mr. Panclasta.**

Biófilo Panclasta.

**I am here to visit you. I am a journalist with the *Cruzada Radical Socialista* from La Calera, and I want to exchange ideas with you.**

Journalists are my allies in wandering. I have always counted on them for all my propaganda. They are my allies.

...?

I come from all parts and none. I can only tell you I am from the world.

...?

All of Europe, except China and all of the Americas.

...?

I was in The Hague, at the time of the Conference. There I saw Messrs. Holguín, Vargas, and Pérez Triana. They provided me with economic aid.

...?

With Malato I don't get along very well. I took back my friendship on the day he said a certain thing about me: "Biófilo Panclasta is not an anarchist. He is a ferocious personalist who, disobeying everything, wants to dominate everyone."

...?

I am not a terrorist in the explosive sense of the word. I was a terrorist when I had the passion and fire of an initiate. But evolutionism has taught me that an isolated crime establishes nothing, and that propaganda only works with the pen and the word.

...?

I am not a Marxist. Karl Marx proceeds from the point of view of historical fatalism, based in the natural evolution of Spencer and the organic evolution of Darwin. Marx places complete faith in those theories, which still remain unproven. And I think that to transform society you have to make a revolution.

...?

Ferrer's death was a juridical assassination, because he founded Schools, just as I have been called terrorist because I am a force in action against despotism in all its forms, including the

monastic one. Nietzsche, Spencer, Unamuno, Max Nordau, Tolstoy, Gorki and all modern thinkers are more or less anarchists without anyone daring to call them terrorists.

...?

I think that in this land the anarchists are Guillermo Valencia, Vargas Vila, and myself. Maybe General Jorge Martínez L. in some way.

**But Valencia is clerical.**

On the outside; on the inside it is anarchist.

**Do you know Arias Correa? He is a ferocious anarchist. He and Palacio Uribe hold classes in the Modern School of Ferrer, the gymnastics teacher professor.**

I know those two “brothers” and I know how high they have flown the flag of my ideas. Arias Correa has tried to discredit me, but I love him. I am like sandalwood: I perfume the ax that strikes me.

**Do you know Rodríguez Triana, another “brother”?**

I know him from his last two letters to *El Pacífico*. Those letters have many points of view with which I am in agreement.

**Tomorrow I will bring another disciple of your School. He is one of the most fortunate ones.**

Who?

**Dr. Laureano Gómez, who edits a libertarian [*ácrata*] newspaper in this city, called *La Unidad*.**

It will be a great pleasure to press the hand of that “brother.”

**And another moderate anarchist will come to visit you as well, from the School of Mateo Morral.**

Which one?

**The editor of *La Sociedad*, a newspaper subsidized by Briand.**

Ah! Briand! His work is great. It is a product of evolutionism. Briand was a communist. Today he is an individualist. And his thought is a peaceful reconciliation of communism and individualism.

**They say here that you have the intention of blowing up Dr. Antonio José Uribe, head of the Cruzada Concentrista, with a bomb. That would be a distortion?**

I do not think Dr. Uribe needs a bomb. We will easily convince Dr. Uribe to join our ranks. We need him for propaganda in the lecture halls.

...?

I think that Colombia is an impossible country, but federation and governmental civilization will get a reaction in the life of the Republic.

...?

I have been persecuted for my ideas; I have been exiled by all governments. I have suffered infinite pains and miseries for upholding this idea that I bear in my brain. But I will not lose heart until I see its triumph on high. My motto is: equality.

...?

I would prefer not to be seen in this suit.

**But it seems fine to me. I don't think of Gorki, Grave, or Tolstoy dressed in a tailcoat. They travel in the book and newspaper in shirtwaist.**

It's all right.

...?

I was immensely nostalgic. I wanted to return to Colombia. And I have felt so well in body and mind that I have even drank chicha, because chicha is a symbol of Colombia.

!!!

...?

In Río de Janeiro I was a close friends of Elisio de Carvalho, libertarian writer and propagandist of my ideas.

...?

Yes, sir. I was part of the strikes in Buenos Aires, but I withdrew from them due to disagreements with one of the organizers.

...?

Theoretically I am still a libertarian, but as I believe that politics is the art of applying, in each era, the part of the ideal that is most adequate to circumstances, my action today in Colombia will be the same as that of Briand in France and Lerroux in Spain.

...!

Why?

**Because they will not allow it here.**

I think we have some freedom. And in that belief I will found *El Radical Socialista*.

**At the press of the Cruzada Católica they will print it for free.**

*It is five o'clock. The photographer has taken a picture of Biófilo, and I have ended the interview. However, Biófilo continues to speak.*

What you feel most when you are imprisoned is that you have lost even the right to commit a crime.

*Now, don't frown, dear neighbors of the parish. Biófilo is totally harmless. [...] I respect and admire him. Simply because in Biófilo Panclasta there is a dream. And a man who has not been able to make life equal to a dream deserves respect. Biófilo is not a terrorist. Not even an anarchist. He is simply a dreamer. He caresses his idea as he caresses a woman...*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Originally published as "Biófilo Panclasta" in *El Republicano*, Bogotá, N° 766, February 10, 1911, page 2. Translation source: "Biófilo Panclasta" in *Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural "Alas de Xué", 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

## Interview with Biófilo Panclasta in El Gráfico

[Introduction indicates that it was the reporter who did the above interview with *El Republicano*, the day before, who alerted this reporter to BP's presence in Bogotá]

*The jail: the door is opened for us and we see Biófilo speaking out in the open, surrounded by various employees, some curious listeners and policemen, and a priest. Before greeting the terrible anarchist I make a phone call to the offices of El Gráfico:*

*"Send a photographer. Panclasta is making propaganda in jail."*

*When the photographer arrives a picture is taken to go with the article.*

*Meanwhile, Panclasta, in a many-colored oration, expounds his theories. He mentions episodes of his life story, proposes examples, recalls names, and demolishes systems.*

*A policeman whispers in my ear:*

*"Smart guy, right? If this man were dressed up he could attain some notability here."*

*Speaking of notability, I asked him for his opinion on many personalities of our time, naming them one by one. Panclasta smiles, asks me to repeat the names and tells me that he has no news of those famous nobodies.*

**Do you think, Mr. Biófilo, sir, that the State is the enemy of the individual?**

Yes. A State such as the one I find myself in is the worst enemy one can have.

**And so are you planning to throw one or more bombs here?**

I have already said that I am a peaceful citizen. If I had gunpowder, I wouldn't waste it on some turkeys; I would make firecrackers to sell. If I do hope to transform humanity, it is with my word: my word of honor.

**But aren't you an apostle of destruction? Don't you want to disturb the world?**

No sir! What for? The world will end on its own, as a seer has predicted, on October 25, 1916. That will be a memorable date for the coming generations!

**And you are not a Molotov thrower, either?**

No sir. I light myself up with something else.

**A nihilist?**

Not that either. Nihilism gives me a headache.

**A terrorist?**

Terrorism terrorizes me.

**So what do you do?**

I spread my doctrine, I preach equality, and I patiently suffer the persecutions of justice.

**You are a great man.**

That is what Sergi, Turatti, Marx, and a multitude of colleagues have said. And when the river sounds...

*The hour of six rang out and the authorities of the jail declared that our visit was over. We said goodbye to Panclasta and left the jail behind, not without a glimmer of sympathy for this sui generis anarchist...*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Originally published as “El Anarquismo de Biófilo Panclasta” in *El Gráfico*, Bogotá, N° 27, February 11, 1911, page 224. Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, *el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural “Alas de Xué”, 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.



# Red Dawn

Spain rests upon the crater of a great social volcano.

Twenty thousand refugees threaten to cross the borders and the workers of Barcelona prepare to carry out a great strike that, like the previous ones, will be bloody and revolutionary.

And the government persists in the obstinacy of resisting the formidable thrust of this great wave that grows with the popular fury that is always the bloody reverse of all the tyrannies.

The people store up hatred in their soul; thinkers, ideas of redemption in their minds; artists, feelings of love in their imaginations; the people suffer, suffer in silence like the docility of the sea in fair weather: any old basket can command it, but one day, it whips up, it overflows, and nothing and no one can resist its pounding.

The social revolution is a great cry of suffering. It is the complaint of a hundred centuries of ignominy. It is the furtively loosed breath of the virgin imprisoned in the nets of bourgeois inequity, it is the cry of the child who feels hunger, it is the act of the worker without bread, it is the blood of the just who ask heaven for vengeance, it is, ultimately, the mighty roar of humanity that awakens like a lion after slumber to the persistent lash of the whip of death!

The revolution is a redemptive and tragic labor; revolutionaries are almost always unconscious avengers; they split from each other, they oppose each other, they destroy each other, but the revolution is life, the revolution is a people's sublime defense when, above *all laws* both human and natural, their sacred rights of life and liberty are violated.

O! revolution, like light you burn, but like light you also purify and illuminate.

*Biófilo Panclasta*

San Gil Prison, June 28, 1927<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero" lists their source as "Alba Roja" in Nuevo Rumbo, Barranquilla, N° 116, October 23, 1910, page 3. This appears to have been a typo, as the piece is signed 1927 and coincides with an appropriate historical context in Spain. Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural "Alas de Xué", 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# Psychological Sketches of Criollo Revolutionaries

## Jacinto Albarracín C.

A red Don Quixote in search of adventures, loves and sorrows.

The revolution is for him the Dulcinea of a crimson paradise.

Erudite, classicist, and dogmatic, he is severe in doctrine and inconstant in society. Protective of his name as *revolutionary*, with the logs of his academic framework he lights the pyre where he sacrifices himself.

Writer of the clearest style, orator of the pulpit, flattering and gallant, astute and verbose, he comprises the complex kind of revolutionary of the plains.

## Ramón Bernal Azula

It is very rare for lawyers, or men of law, who are always the negotiation of nature, to interpret it as the biological foundation of the social sciences.

But, in Bernal Azula, as in González Sabogal, Jacinto Albarracín and Clodomiro Ramírez, the spirit of the law is the law of the spirit.

They interpret judicial law as a socialization of natural law.

They are an ideological mixture of Montesquieu and Rousseau.

Ramón Bernal Azula is an ardent orator full of noble enthusiasm, fine Damascene dialectics, and sincere righteous passion.

As a writer he is a block of multiple polychrome tonalities, he is almost a sophist, ethics are his aesthetic.

Bernal Azula, as an orator, is impossible to follow.

## Pablo E. Mancera

He is a Prometheus of the ideal. He was one of the first proletarian soldiers who began the workerist movement in 1904. He is a long-suffering and avid social organizer, more of a unionist than an idealist, despite his modest living and writing; he has the qualities of a rebel orator and writer.

His work is very dense and arduous.

For Mancera, to free, to unionize, is to live.

Mancera is the revolutionary Diogenes.

## **Juana J. Guzmán**

Forerunner, like her namesake the Baptist, of social Christianity (as some would call the second human revolution), this noble and intelligent comrade has been the soul of the libertarian revolt in Montería.

Policarpa of the heart, with greater mind and greater conscience than she, she sacrifices everything for her ideal, her beloved; which, like Jesus for Saint Teresa, burns her in flames of her love for the dispossessed.

## **Escolástico Alvarez**

The Maceo of Colombian freedom, one could say of Alvarez what they say of the Cuban hero: he was born, like the diamond from carbon, to give light and courage to life.

“Kolako” as the “kolakas”, birds of love and misery, call him, he is the most popular of the revolutionaries of the Magdalena River: doctor, pharmacist, journalist, he lives for nothing but the ideal of social redemption and human justice.

In association with his brother, he hoisted the red flag in Antioquia with practices of immense kindness, rebellion and sacrifice. Wounded there, “Kolako” founded the “Red Start” that has caused so much trouble for the timid soul of the colorless Arciniégas.

## **Abel de Portillo**

A century of passion made flesh. A heart transformed into a spark that burns and illuminates. A crude fighter, like a sower of lightning. Pure as rock crystal. Generous and sincere, like the sandalwood that perfumes even the ax that strikes it.

He is not a journalist, sage, or artist. He is a rebel. He is something more, he is a worker who, as he amasses his daily bread with his calloused hands, likewise forges libertarian tempests in his volcanic mind.

## **Carlos F. León**

Láutaro gave him his character and Juárez his heroic valor; a native like them, he has the aborigines' indomitable purity.

The synthesis of a race oppressed and defeated but not degraded.

León is stone faced; but like all mountains he has the guts of a volcano. Slow to speak, sincere and methodical. Valiant and loyal.

For León as for his blood relative Juárez, peace means the respect for the rights of others.

## **Fidedigno Cuellar and Enriqueta de Cuéllar**

“And like two waves of changeable mother-of-pearl that grow closer and closer to the shore, our united souls go ever on along the path of life.” This stupendous verse by Gutiérrez González seems written to express the intimate life of Enriqueta and Fidedigno Cuéllar.

Two minds in one bicephalous soul of the ideal; two wings of one eagle lost in the immensity of the ocean; two fighters, united in a single spasm of battle, of love, and of agony.

## **Ismael Gómez Alvarez**

He is Bakunin's ideal type of revolutionary.

Like a shipwrecked soul in the red ocean who sees the saving beach in the far distance, he has abandoned everything to swim, to struggle, in the tempestuous revolutionary sea.

Composure of Maceo, soul of Asis, if his satchel lacks bread his veins are not wanting for blood and from it he nourishes his heroic living-fighting.

He is the communist Ricaurte.

## **Neftali Arce**

The Robespierre of the social revolution.

Meticulously dressed, elegantly spoken, temperate in vice; well-groomed and refined.

He has an artistic love of arson and, like Nero, would be capable of burning the world just for the pleasure of getting carried away in destruction.

Well-loved and preferred but not a selector, he has the egoism of being first in the ideal, first in the struggle and the first to sacrifice himself.

## **Servio Tulio Sanchez**

Bagger of ideals. The ideal kind of "Manquillo de los Merinales," with a package always carried under his arm, the treasure of a studious Bohemian. Orator of the barricade, feather of the condor, ungainly and agile, wordy and passionate.

For Servio, to struggle is to enjoy. He travels through the world with the delight of a river that goes calling through the flowery and the arid riverbanks the plaintive shouts of his living as he flows. Obstacles purify his soul; in his tempestuous deeps he carries flowers, shit, pearls and mud.

## **Juan de Dios Romero**

A secular John of God; like him, he only lays down his soldier's duties to bring pieces of his scant bread to his brothers the disinherited.

An untiring fighter, he will even commit crime to keep living his life. Courageous and hostile, he steps back only out of pity.

A writer in the style of a waterfall. His language lacks book learning; but it has delights of thunder, cloudscapes of lightning.

Juan de Dios is a true Romero, always sad and always green. He hates seriousness, and in his inheritances he gets the lion's share.

## **General Saavedra and Daughter**

He is not a military man; he is a soldier of freedom. He carried the blade of the hero on the battlefields and now, on the field of the ideal, he fights with the boldness of youth; like the father of Atanacio Girardot, he has passed the social battles to his intelligent and Amazonian daughter who as a revolutionary is a beautiful red reality.

Among that group of rebels from Moniquirá, all worthy of glorious mention, we choose these two names, because the narrow field prevents us from speaking of all.

## **Lizandro Candia Q.**

An Indian carving of red gold. A snow-capped and embattled summit, he weighs the sky with his ideals and treads emeralds underfoot in his ardent and noble dreamer's path. Neither a writer nor a poet, neither learned nor lettered; not even a worker; he is a lily sick with love and rebellion; respectful and generous, his only ambition is others' happiness.

In the blue sky of his revolutionary dreams, he waits, provoking hope for hope.

## **Manuel Camargo**

Flower of snow, ponderous and rotund; absurd and loquacious. Paradoxical, ironic, an elegant sophist. Fervent in speech, ardent in thought, sensitive and voluptuous.

Well-loved and preferred.

Inconstant and stubborn.

Very optimistic and very inconsiderate, he is nevertheless amiable because he loves and hates with the passion of a schoolboy.

Erudite and sensible, he has still not formed his writing style.

But he is a hope: a beautiful, red hope.

## **Julia Ruiz**

Love for her is admiration set on fire and sublimated piety.

"I stopped being a sister of charity," she says, "because I couldn't do charity as one."

And by charity she understands love. "I love because I have struggled and have suffered much."

"I loved the liberals as persecuted, but as persecutors they don't even deserve my heart's enthusiasm nor the effort of my pen."

Julia Ruiz is a Joan of Arc, with a pen for a dagger, with her longings for freedom and justice as a religion and with the revolution as the sublime ideal of her heart.

## **Baldomero Sanín Cano**

The most philosophical of the revolutionaries — and the least revolutionary of the philosophers.

Erudite and universal. Stylish and methodical. A forward-thinking evolutionist of the Stuart Mill school, he got to the socialist vanguard before anyone.

Disdainful and anti-academic, he does not like contact with workers, nor do they make him golden armchairs.

He will be the José Ingenieros of the revolution.

## **María Cano**

Butterfly of libertarian love who burns her wings in the bonfire of human travesty, dazzled by the splendor of burning souls.

A whimsical flower full of perfumes that intoxicate the passengers on the road of liberty.

A bird who does not fear the voluptuous cruelty of the furtive hunter, “Red Star”, in a clear sky of the prisoners of the ideal.

Sensitive soul.

Heart of Magdalene.

Flame, light, angel, bird, flower, nothing more.

Red...

Red, indeed.

Very red!

## **Esteban Rodríguez Triana**

“Colombia and I are like this.” Complex soul, apocalyptic character. Nostalgic bird. A peacock feather, not by way of vanity but for the many brilliant colors.

Disinterested and sincere.

Bohemian and ascetic,

A skeptical ascetic,

An unbelieving artist.

Student of law, writer, journalist. He has only wanted to be one thing: Esteban Rodríguez Triana.

Hail to you, proto-martyr, you carry in your mind the thinker’s fire!

## **Aníbal Badel**

Aníbal is a revolutionary because he is a rebel.

Perhaps he is lacking in ideologies. He is not an author or a scientist. He cannot judge feelings, but he is an impressionist.

He loves emotion.

Love moves him.

And love makes heroes by fashion or by tragedy.

He would like to be, would be, a butterfly, an idea seduces him just like a flower, but he is inconstant.

But love can do anything, since love is the affinity of souls, the attraction of molecules, gravity in space, heaviness in bodies.

Badel is not Badel.

## **Tomas Uribe Márquez**

He has the knack for proselytism of Uribe, the statesman's sense of President Márquez and the doubt of his namesake and apostle.

He is the Desmoulins of the revolution.

Neither crazy enthusiasm nor fits of hysteria.

Rhythmic as a funereal metronome.

Discrete when he works.

Prudent if he speaks.

Incendiary as a writer.

Colorful, sharp, clean style, modesty of learning, logical and penetrating.

Like the turtle, he goes slowly, but his shell is a shield that gives off sparks.

## **Pacho and Pablo Cote**

The Quintero brothers of Colombian journalism.

Eclectic, sensible, practical.

Combative and discrete.

Agile and astute.

Little loud vanity, great sense of means; harmonic souls, strong arms, crystalline forces of will.

Laborers of thought and of work, modern laborers, they synthesize the soul of this virile and sentimental people in a single moment for their "not so small" homeland.

## **Luis A. Rozo**

A steel cord modulating songs of love and freedom.

Always like so: like strong steel, like love, amiable as prescribed freedom.

Oceanic of heart and beloved of will; poor in attitude towards society.

He loves the ideal like a shield; with it he shields his noble *I* and his self.

Neither enchantments nor flattery. Idleness, prudence, character.

Like the great mountains: bowels of fire, cold face; revolutionary majesty.

Luis A. Rozo is the thermometer of the revolution.

## **José Maria Olozaga**

A vision of Richelieu. Organizer and tactician. Quixotic in bearing. Martial in instinct. Combative and convincing. Loquacious and eloquent. Generous and methodical. Cynical and frank. A torrential writer. A hurried orator. A substantial thinker.

Basque in race, he is Basque in character, Spanish of heart, tropical in imagination.

Like so many other revolutionaries, he comes from the bureaucratic bourgeois camp and, like Kropotkin the prince, Malatesta the count, Reclus the wealthy, he brought only his noble conviction to the red camp, where while if the living is not lucrative, the fighting is glorious indeed.

## Ignacio Torres Giraldo

The most Attic of the *criollo* stylists.

Speech of lightning, logic of steel, language of a fountain embedded with sands of gold.

Free of frenzies and spasms.

Faith of a sage, action of a soldier.

Meticulous and popular.

Select and selective.

Rough faced, strong souled.

Straight willed.

He loves the ideal as a woman, as everyone loves it; love is struggle.

The revolution is a woman.

## Jorge Uribe Márquez

Golden honeybee.

A tireless worker in the human colony.

He does not know of the flowers' honey, he only harvests love in fraternal souls.

Erudite, student of law and journalist, he, like Bakunin, only accepts a weapon as knowledge and knowledge as a weapon.

Affable and generous; like all fighters he is hard and devout; he loves and despises; son of the Andes; he lives with the condor in the heights and, like the condor, if he finds it impossible to win he will not find it impossible to die.

## Julio Buritica G.

He seems of wax, and is of steel. Affable and courteous as a friend; he is intense and irascible as a revolutionary. Adaptable spirit, Christian will; the ideological evolution of his *I* was rapid and, like a caterpillar, upon leaving his dark conservative robes, the red butterfly shone with splendor its wings in the proletarian camp. He is a sower of ideals in every cultural field. Teacher, journalist and orator, he has sacrificed everything for the noble vanity of being a martyr.

## Pacho Valencia

He is a red dawn kissing the ruins of a medieval city.

He is the songbird deflowering the silence of a saddened field.

Pacho Valencia is a sick man, of dismal silences.

An orator, unlike his brother Guillermo, like the Quetzal, on seeing himself enslaved he covers his singing head with his white wings and dies.

Pacho Valencia is a revolutionary glory.



## Jose Gonzalo Sánchez

Like Sandino, he is the last rebel of the vanquished race, but like Samson he dies while killing his oppressors. Huila has not heard a more terrifying voice. The Andes have not been climbed by a more daring revolutionary.

He defends humanity as a socialist, but he suffers of the nostalgia of the Chibcha Jeremiahs under the melancholy willows of an age of infamy. He is his race. He is 20 centuries of Colombia.

## Juan Bautista Villafañe

Like José Gonzalo Sánchez and like the Indian Quintín Lame, these three are the august trinity of the aboriginal race who, with Láutaro and Manco Capac, made the inquisitorial and Gothic Spain tremble.

His work in the Sierra Nevada is unparalleled among human efforts for the emancipation of the oppressed.

Like the Eskimos, the snow of the Sierra is his refuge and there, like the hero of Nicaragua, he will resist the hordes of traitors who, in the name of religion, liberalism and the homeland, barter with the honor of the race and sell to the insolent *yanki* the mother of us all: Colombia!

## Juan de Dios Gutiérrez Iregui

In all countries and times the shoemaker has always been a natural rebel. Since Samuel, the errant Jew, history indicates this skeptic as an unbeliever in the prophecies of Jesus...

And Simón "the shoemaker," presumed murdered by the pigeon of the tyrant Louis XVII the Dauphin, preferred his mending of old shoes to the honors of the victorious bourgeoisie.

Gutiérrez is the old indefatigable fighter. Like Malatesta, his life is a generous wine that becomes stronger the more it ages.

## Alberto Pulido

Wanderer of restless sole; dreamer of condor flights, fever of wings, desert eagle's wings.

From the first flashes of the social dawn, his rooster's voice has tirelessly called to the red sun.

Crazy like Jesus, Galileo, and Columbus, he has never cared about poverty, prison, and death.

Pulido is an indefatigable fighter; popular orator, polytechnic worker, parish poet; generous and brave. Over his gray haired years floats the loving, adventurous, flirty soul of a twenty-year-old.

## Julio Campo Vásquez

He is the Red Sucre, Knight of Promethean combats; he works in the glorious camp of an ideal that every rebel apostle has dreamt of. Courtly writer of the d'Annunzio school, his pen is the rock of Moses from which marvelous water springs, convincing the doubtful. Demosthenian orator; his torrent of ideas become sparks, carries the thirsty souls, the neurosis of social fire. Campo Vásquez is a bird who, with his white wings, climbs to a very high, very red peak.

## Jorge Madero

The “chic” type of aristocratic revolutionary. Effusive, vehement; affectionate as a cat; speedy as a hare; reads little, knows less, talks a lot. With his bourgeois last name, he is malleable as a “madero”<sup>1</sup>, and enthusiastic as a peasant on a Sunday.

His revolutionary ideal is just an Osiris serenade at the foot of a window in an abandoned castle.

He is a romantic revolutionary; he is a child playing with fire.

## Armando Solano

A mixture of Lamartine and Voltaire. Sentimental and mystical; ironic and rancorous. Attic writer, Apollonian stylist; chronicler of minute details. He seems modest, and he is proud. There is much syncretism in his Flaubertian quill.

Like his fellow countryman Sotero, who is a “sote”,<sup>2</sup> if we divide Solano’s name in half we would be left with the first particle, “sol”<sup>3</sup>... the psychic antithesis of his sublime “I”.

Building the revolution à la Dumas, it is, for him, a hothouse daisy. His socialism is a “maitresse de Renard.”<sup>4</sup>

## Felipe Lleras Camargo

The weak and jaundiced man who poured out the tormentous soul of Robespierre is like a mental model of this criollo revolutionary who writes with a hand that is a great tree branch made of sparks.

Lleras Camargo is a fugitive of this anticlerical dungeon called Colombia; a Jeremiah-like fugitive who places in the accursed graves that separate us from civilization, all of the sadness of the defeated and all of the indignation of the rebel.

“Ruy Blas” is a red oasis in the desert of the nation, and Felipe Llerars Camargo is the “unchanging” sower.

## Abel Botero

Puritan as a Quaker; gladiator with a lovely and rare fighting style; idealistic revolutionary; ethical idealist. Among those of that heroic phalanx of the “new” he is like a ruby encrusted in a marble frame.

His sociological concepts are quite doctrinaire and thus strange in these arrogant but uneducated herds.

He will make the red-bohemian life practical in the criollo applications of the revolutionary moment.

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<sup>1</sup> Dummy.

<sup>2</sup> Chigger.

<sup>3</sup> Sun.

<sup>4</sup> A popular comic novel.

## Gabriel Chávez C.

The moaning murmur of the waves of the Magdalena has vibrated in the soul of this old idealist like the desolate tears of an abandoned mother. In Chávez, all is heart; he even loves the snake that bites him; in his soul he bears all the essences of the primitive jungle and the deep wishes of a barricade. He is not well-read, and he only reads the newspapers that speak to him of love and rebellion. He is a tropical Tolstoy; coarse and combative, in sum he is a red sentry at a mountaintop of fantasies.

## Efraim de la Cruz

Master of bohemia, fantastical and acute; simian and talkative; wounding and an avenger. Impenitent invert, voracious and quavering; neither whistles, nor drums, nor rivers, nor “Rubicons” will put out the fire of his happy living.

He writes the way schoolgirls play at love. Vacant and errant, he neither thinks about what he writes nor says what he thinks.

After all the years made him “cartomantic”<sup>5</sup>, as if he could foresee García’s future. “But if it is all in vain and the soul does not forget you, what do you want me to do, piece of my life, what do you want me to do, with this ‘Rubicon’?”

## Jaime Barrera Parra

If something strongly refutes the paradoxical thesis of Laureano Gómez it is the anthropogeographic, criollo, tropical figure of Barrera Parra.

Never has an ethnic type been modeled by the physical environment more ethnically; that is, Barrera is a legitimate plant of the tropical flora.

And yet, like Juárez, Juan Montalvo, and Maceo, Jaime has a superhuman soul. “Idealism,” as Barrera Parra says in *Universidad*, “must be as compatible with action as, within a human organism, cerebral function is compatible with locomotion.”

Action and thought. Revolutionary unity. This renewal, which would appear to be the work of “El Libertador”, is the work of the moment that Jaime Barrera Parra so practically announces.

## Leonilde Riaño

These “red flowers of work” like *barbasco* flowers, are ever more beautiful the more poisonous they are.

We had already denominated María Cano the “Red Star” that so disturbs the easily frightened spirits of the “Rengifian” colonels and generals.

What’s more, as a flower poisons more than a star, let us agree that Leonilde will continue to be called that; for she is a flower as a woman, and bile and poison as a revolutionary.

The Mystery of El Salto made her amazon soul mysterious — she writes like a comet’s tail soaking in the red sea of the ideal.

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<sup>5</sup> A fortune teller who uses cards.

A people has not died when it has women like Leonilde Riaño, revolutionary Flower of the Tequendama.

## **J... Nieto**

Ardor of the twenty-year-old; an arm that feels the nostalgias of warlike struggle; audacious and combative; obliging and generous.

Vehement and sincere; not too learned, quite new in his knowledge; neat and tenacious; he is, as Luis Cano said, a “Lenin-ian Biófilo”; but his communism is only a fighter’s discipline: his ideal is anarchic.

## **Me!**

*Biófilo*, in Greek means lover of life, *Panclasta*, enemy of all. This contradiction explains me *ego sum quim sum!*<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Latin form of the “I am that I am” in *Exodus*.

<sup>7</sup> Originally published in *Claridad*, Bogotá, #s 52–56, May — June, 1928. Translation source: “Comprimidos Psicológicos de los Revolucionarios Criollos” in Biófilo Panclasta, *el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural “Alas de Xué”, 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# I Do Not Rectify, I Ratify

## Statement to Judge Lombana

When, in the presence of the public calamities that afflict the unfortunate Colombian people; when, in the presence of the Catholic and miserable state to which Colombia has arrived, a group of thinkers of all parties, but a group of generous, rebellious and sincere thinkers, threw to the peasants, workers and poor students a manifesto of revolutionary solidarity, action and selection, no one thought or could have thought that this emergence of thought would be considered a crime, since, despite all the tyranny in Colombia, the simple expression of ideas had still never been considered a nefarious crime.

The unfortunately celebrated Judge Lombana has initiated a criminal process against the persons who signed the Manifesto of the National Center of Revolutionary Unity and Action to the workers, peasants and *poor students of Colombia*.

We do not know what judicial pretext Judge Lombana has made use of to initiate such inequity, but in any case we will not be the ones who rectify our statements out of childish fear or personal benefit; quite to the contrary, still standing after this blow to our insistence, with pride we ratify and widen that which we proclaim in broad daylight, yesterday, today and forever, as the beautiful, intangible and glorious ideal of our life: the revolutionary ideal.

The Manifesto calls for the union of all beings who hunger for freedom, fraternity, and justice, because in this dark hour, when all the tyrannies, phantasms and miseries hang over the defenseless Colombian people; in this cruel hour when Colombia writhes in agony between thieves and traitors, when life has been made unbearable, when neither government, congress nor society do anything but sacrifice the suffering and defenseless people, when the country kneels before the filibustering *yanquis*, when we lack protective laws, defenses, bread, roof, life, then defense is a sacred *right* and this defense can only be made by the very people who suffer, agonize, pass away.

Therefore we call for the union of all who suffer, all who think, all men of good and noble will.  
*Is it a crime to associate for the defense of the right to life?*

And the center also says it is of action, because the most heroic thoughts are worth nothing if they are not transformed into deeds.

*Action* is labor, activity, deeds. But it takes all the bad faith of the reigning iniquity to confuse *revolutionary action* with war, riots, killings, attacks.

"The greatest human revolution," said the religious author Donoso Cortés, "has been the change in hearts called the Christian Revolution."

And "History of the Revolution" is what the historian Restrepo calls the great movement of American emancipation. Words, like ideas, have the significance given them by the mind that conceives them. For Judge Lombana, the word *revolution* is diabolical, criminal, but the good name of the Colombian people cannot be made prisoner of imbecility and infamy by the hyper-conservative criteria of a medieval judge.

No center, club, community is organized but to function within the ideas, purposes and circumstances that determine it. Disorganized as the different revolutionary seeds are, without orientation, direction or prosecution, as the great proletarian peasant masses are discovering, it is necessary for the country's rebels to organize, become compact, and educate themselves so as to fight united against the triple monster of *yanki*, Catholic and bourgeois tyranny that oppresses and annihilates the suffering and defenseless Colombian people.

The Constitution, which we only cite as the dogma of our adversary, guarantees the right of association.

*It is a crime to associate for one's defense against all the enemies that stalk and kill?*

And finally, the Manifesto of union and action, was also one of *revolutionary* choice. "We have not come to the ranks of the revolution because of novelty or a momentary enthusiasm, nor do we have in it any intentions that the most exalted militant cannot know.

"We are soldiers of the proletarian ideal, from the beginning of the workers' agitations in Colombia, throughout the entire duration of our activities, we have obtained no other benefit than the satisfaction of having fulfilled our duty."

Because it is well known throughout the country that spurious elements of all the political failures have unfortunately called themselves revolutionaries, without any other aim than that of vengeance, exploitation and exhibitionism. Centers, syndicates, committees and persons have called themselves revolutionaries and with cunning tricks they have exploited the good proletarian faith and with ridiculous boasting they have wanted to intimidate the easily frightened spirit of a government of scarecrows.

And seeing as we have nothing in common with those parasitic and nasty elements, just as we neither have nor want to make ourselves feared for what we are not, as we expect nothing of pacts or alliances with parties of bourgeois or political rumor-mongering, *as the emancipation of the workers must be the work of the workers themselves, the Center of Revolutionary Union, Action and Selection*, formed by intellectual workers of all revolutionary tendencies, threw the country its message of fraternity and rebellion which despite all the tyrannies and fanaticisms is the voice of justice that resounds in all regions of agonizing Colombia.

And nothing and no one will extinguish that voice, just as nothing will stop the march of things on the fateful path of evolution.

Therefore, I, as a revolutionary, as a character and a will that may be broken but never gives in, before Judge Lombana's cruel attitude, will loudly repeat as the proud victim: you can oppress my body, but you will not eclipse my thought.

I do not rectify, I ratify!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Originally "Yo ratifico, no rectifico," signed Bogotá, Tuesday November 13, 1928 and published in *El Socialista*, Bogotá, #356, November 18, 1928, page 3. Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, *el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural "Alas de Xué", 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# My Prisons, My Exiles, My Life

## Without Prologue

I do not want anyone to introduce me: Biófilo introduces Panclasta. A book like this is not analyzed—it is felt. This is not a didactic work, or even a literary one. It is the written expression of a strange life. Emotions, sad pages, flashes of happiness and of hope, words...

Life is the soul of modern literature. This is why Gorky, D'Annunzio, Zamacois are the authors of the day. This is why Zola is the father of realism, which is not a literary school but a school of life.

I, "lover of life" (*Bió-filo*), cannot be unfaithful to my lover. So this is a realistically lived work. Through its pages runs my existence, like a stream, which runs now down a steep, now through a flowered valley, leaving complaints and weeping here, canticles and arpeggios there.

The life of a soldier, an adventurer, an artist. Complex and strange life. Life of a knight without a sword, steed or money.

Life: my lover, woman to the end, is capricious and fickle. She has made me "prince and pauper"; gentleman, beggar, bohemian and colonel.

"I have dined at the table of the great lords" and drank from the cup of shabby drunks. I have slept beneath the golden canopy of dreamy courtesans and shivered through miserable nights on the musty banks of the River Plate and the Seine.

I wore the red sackcloth of the altar boy; my first ideal was to be the priest's darling. I prayed with the foolish fervor of a bumpkin. I was a fanatic and a mystic. As an anarchist I verged on the madness of Caligula but, at the same time, I have always despised the vile human herd.

I love music with an Apollonian love. I have strummed the lyre and sung to my lover—there are times when I live as a lark among the forests of myrtle and orange blossoms and others as a plucked owl amid shadows.

Justice is for me a cult, but like all gods mine is only in my imagination; its reality depends solely on my will. I hate hatred. I love love. My admiration for everything beautiful is the flower of my soul. My ethics is aesthetics. I bless the water, I profess vice, I despise the addict but I drink wine, chicha... and everything else.

The women who have shared with me their bread and their love—I keep them all in the diamondine coffer of memory, their names sculpted with passionate longings. I have loved them all as Jesus loved Mary Magdalene or as St. Teresa of Ávila loved Christ.

As an old veteran recounts to old comrades, by the warmth of the fire, his exploits of yesteryear, making them collectively live in memory "the idylls of a bygone age," so do I, in these pages written especially for all my accomplices (even if only for an instant of my life), want to condense emotions, friendships, lived anguishes which bring to fellow souls in the spell of distant memory the invigorating delight of the past which, like everything past, is beautiful...

To you, to all of you — Simons of Cyrene, Gaius Maecenas, Magdalenes, Almas-oasis<sup>1</sup> or Judas Iscariotes — who have put a flower, a thorn or a spine in my life's path, to you I dedicate these "yellow pages of the road... written with what tears I have left." (Juan Antonio Perez Bonalde, "Vuelta a la Patria" 1875)

## Epiphany

At 5 in the morning, on Sunday, October 26, 1879, my mother bore me in the village of Chinácota, in the house of doctor Emilio Villamizar, he the husband of Mrs. Carmen Leal de Villamizar.

My mother, Simona Lizcano, daughter of talented peasants from Silos, was raised in the home of the well-off quasi-wise-man-peasant Clemente Montañez in Chitagá, from where she left for Pamplona, to the home of Bishop Toscano, and from there to Chinácota, where my father, Bernardo Rojas, met her, loved her... and I came from that free and loving union.

My mother, ashamed of the crime of bearing a child, had to depart from the Villamizar Leal household, taking the road to Pamplona, where she was going to hide the dishonor of being a mother without having followed through with the stupid rituals of a hypocritically consecrated union.

The road is rough and desolate. The temperature is warm and it is rainy. She had walked a few hours, sad and fainting, with a load as beloved as it was heavy. She felt a dizzy spell overcome her, reclined under a tree and began to feel the vertigo of death.

Like that Russian child whose mother, returned from Siberia where her husband had died, died too in the midst of the snow, like that most unhappy orphan I played with the almost stiff face of my mother.

That is all I know.

Of Pamplona, which holds the ineffable treasures of memory in the loveliest age of my life, the first impression I recall is that of my mothers' silhouette reclining above the Pamplonita river, washing from sunup to sundown, in that place so harsh for nourishing the life of her sole great love. Around 1883, my mother took a post as a cook in the house of Don Santos Carvajal. I have an eternally fresh memory of an earthquake that year, which frightened everyone living in that house.

A priest, Domiciano Valderrama, with a rope around his voluminous gut laughed at the timid women's fear. I did not flee; I grabbed his robe, making the symbolic figure of clerical Colombia, which was born in that instant and which for almost my whole life I would see yoked to Rome.

Leaving that house, we went to live with my mothers' sisters. Devout and impenitent Lucía and Guadalupe, and the cruel and ironical Claudia; I have few happy memories of that foggy time.

In 1886, we went to live in a large building that doubled as a public boy's school. The teachers were Father Mora and Prada, a musician. There I drank my first cup of human knowledge.

And with other days came other teachers. Eliseo Delgado, Eustaquio Mantilla, Andrés Tobón, Pascual Moreno, Félix Marra Jaimes.

By 1890, I was already the best history student. It was like an intuition of the eternal exile of my life.

Having completed my school studies, which I did side by side with my altar boy duties, I began to study Church music with Celestino Villamizar who taught me the staff and the do, re, mi...

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<sup>1</sup> Oasis souls



In Pamplona, and maybe in Colombia, at that time there was no career other than that of sexton, because the priesthood was forbidden me for being poor and born out of wedlock.

The irony of it all! The three great supporters of the conservative party have been born out of wedlock: Enrique Arboleda C. true savior of clericalism in Palonegro, Marco Fidel Suárez, born leader; Ismael Enrique Arciniégas, lively spokesman.

## **Pariahs of the Law: Voices of the Desert?**

Open letter to esteemed Mr. Dr. Enrique Olaya Herrera (fraternally)

*El Diario Nacional*, your old organ of admonition and combat, has published in its edition of last Friday a piece addressed to the citizen president of Colombia by a “barbarically whipped Colombian.”

It is a monstrous case, but it is not only not rare, it is frequent. What is strange is that Mr. Pedro J. Amaya has emerged from the horrid tombs that Gomezuelan<sup>2</sup> dungeons are.

Human language has no words that can express all of the evil in those dens, which would have horrified the inquisitors of the middle ages.

Montalvo finds it admirable that Silvio Pellico, in his pained book *Mis prisiones*, does not show indignation against his captors for their infamy and great cruelty; but I think that what the famous and long-suffering prisoner lacked were words with which to express how much his heart suffered in those torments.

I have also attempted to tell the horrors of my being buried alive for seven years; I have tried to describe the thousand tortures with which Gómez’s tormentors bring death to their innocent victims; I have wished to translate into human language all of the despairing bitterness, all of the fright that my grieving soul suffered in listening to the cries of torture suffered by thousands of companions in those Dantesque pits.

But neither Raphael nor Michelangelo, with their magic brushes, nor Dante, with his infernal quill, could have given a graphical or spoken form to the torments of the Gomezian prisons, never imagined by any sort of Dantesque mind.

I saw with my eyes full of tears the murder of Pedro Piña in the Castle of Puerto Cabello; I was a suffering witness to every instant, my soul grieving for my companion’s pain, of the assassination by hunger of Luis Osorio, in the Valencia jail by infamous order of Emilio Fernández, false son and torturer of the priest Briceño.

I have seen many captives, maddened by hunger, stir up the human shitpiles, trying to feed on putrefaction.

And I do not want to speak of the countryside traps, a torment invented by the ferocious Eustoquio Gómez, nor of the frightening torture of the game bag, which consists in putting a victim in a large game bag, which is then hung from a rafter and made to balance between two rows of bayonets, throwing it from one to the other, producing a death as slow as it is horrifying.

I do not want to remember, without feeling it, the delirium of torture, the twisting of limbs until they break, the torment of the scratches, the horror of the *tortol*,<sup>3</sup> the stretching of the feet and what is impossible to tell or believe, the attacking of tied-up men by rabid dogs...

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<sup>2</sup> Gomezuelan (or Gomezuela) is a combination of Venezuela with the name of the then-dictator Juan Gómez.

<sup>3</sup> Colombian torture instrument consisting of a rope tourniquet applied to the temples.

But the most common death is from hunger. One, two, three months; the prisoner slowly wastes away; finally the weight of the shackles, the cold of the stones, the cries of torture turn him mad and stupid...

Thousands of victims have suffered a horrible death in these prisons.

Pedro J. Amaya was tortured, but he only stayed a few days and managed to escape a certain and horrifying death. He has had the luck to come before his country... and raise his pained complaint...

Will it be heard?

I also, after seven years buried alive, arrived in July 1921 and visited you in the offices of *El Diario Nacional*. I visited then-president Marco Fidel Suárez. I told him not of my torments and complaints, but those of so many unfortunate compatriots suffering in the Gomezuelan dungeons.

Don Marco did nothing...

Why?

For the same reason that Caro did nothing, when Gaona was executed, that Marroquín did nothing when Doctor Ricardo Becerra was exiled, or that he himself did something when Doctor Rico and his secretary, the teacher Arciniégas, were expelled from Colombia. For the same reason that Reyes did nothing, when General Herrera and his secretary, Doctor Olaya Herrera, were thrown out. For the same reason that neither Suárez, nor Ospina, nor Abadla Méndez, did nothing for the hundreds of imprisoned, tortured, victimized, unsentenced, though not in any grand way, in Gomezuela.

It's that we Colombians are, in other lands, legal pariahs.

And since this new administration begins under patriotic and justice-oriented impulses, I think the first duty of the president and his ministers, of the parliamentary representatives, is to defend, to save their unfortunate brothers from the most horrifying of victimizations: that of Juan "the Bison".<sup>4</sup>

It is incredible, and shameful, that in the American parliament, representatives such as Mr. Gasque, Mr. Sandín, Mr. Ransdell, accuse the Venezuelan government of being unworthy and barbarous, while our legislators have not said a single word in defense of so many compatriots so infamously tortured.

In this city lives Mr. Arturo Lara, who was in shackles for seven years in prison in Caracas; and Mr. Cuervo Osorio, who suffered eight years in the Puerto Cabello fortress, together with many other comrades of Humberto Gómez. And right now, as emotion overwhelms me, I don't remember more.

Juan Vicente Gómez's minister in Washington, with a singularly Gomezuelan accuracy but little diplomatic aim, attacked from *La Prensa* in New York against the above-mentioned humanitarian congressmen, who he describes as impostors, liars, fakes...

Doctor Pedro M. Arcaya describes the painful sacrifice with bloody tears, among shadows and distortions, sent like the last despairing "argh!" of thousand of mothers before the horrifying agony of their children, as anonymous and worthless papers.

The Gomezian minister challenges Mr. Representative Gasque to publish the proofs in the impartial organ of the press *Congressional Record*, whatever he has against the Venezuelan government.

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<sup>4</sup> Juan Vicente Gómez.

UGH! It's enough to say that there is not a handful of Venezuelan dirt that is not washed in the innocent blood of some victim. There is no house, even that of Gómez, where denunciation, terror, misery have not cast their nefarious shadows.

There are no estates, animals, houses in Gomezuela that do not practically belong to the monstrous Juan the Bison.

And if there, where neither peace, nor quiet, nor property are respected, we are assured that freedom and order are the rule, then we must admit that the words have neither ideological nor moral significance.

"No foreign power," states Minister Arcaya, "no citizen of another country has any reason to get mixed up in our affairs."

But then why had Gómez tortured, defamed, victimized so many hundreds of innocent foreigners who, as in the case of Humberto Gómez, went to that generous land in search of bread, asylum, wine?

Why was Timoteo Morales Rocha, uncle of the Attic Luis Enrique Osorio, buried for seven years in a pigsty in Valencia, and a brother of Osorio Lizarazo, eight years, and Arturo Lara, nine?

And... Biófilo Panclasta buried alive for seven years. *Mundo al Día* published a list of prisoners and, horrified, people learned that there are prisoners like Fernando Márquez, who have been in the pit for eighteen years, shackled, whipped.

There's more... slavery, that infamous dealing in human flesh which, today, all nations are ashamed of, still exists in its most cruel form (and worse) in Venezuela, with slaves bought in unhappy Colombia. In fact, traders in men come from Borure, Motatán, and other towns on Lake Maracaibo, they come to Guajira, and using flattery, gifts, drunken overtures, seduce the poor indians who, tricked by fake offers, march with their families to the refineries and haciendas of **Gómez & Accomplices Inc.** and once there where they are subjected to the cruelest work and mistreatment, they can never leave because they can never pay what they owe, according to the monstrous contract of iniquitous exploitation to which they are subjected.

"No citizen of another country has any reason to get mixed up in our affairs..." but nations, like individuals, have **duties** to fulfill, if they want **rights** to demand.

Today Gomezuela is the Cain of the Americas, the Judas of humanity, and if England, Italy, and Germany blocked Venezuela in 1902, for defaulting on debt payments, and Europe allied against imperial Germany, the world today must all unite to raze this Gomezuela, fright and mockery of all humanity.

And we might feel a certain shame, a moral disgust when discussing such matters in an organ of the free press, but like the sheet reproduced in *La Prensa* in New York, circulating on good paper and clean printing among important people, the Colombian press, which has no commitments to struggle, except with the people, of the people, and by the people of all countries, for the people of Venezuela (Gomezuela) we point to the danger of this propaganda as a danger to the few liberties we still have left.

In Venezuela, where the reading of a newspaper like *El Tiempo* from Bogotá, Mexico, or Santo Domingo is a crime, in Venezuela where the very Olaya Herrera was **thrown out**, in Gomezuela a Colombian and worst of all liberal president is not honored except because Gómez is getting ready to personally conquer Colombia.

In 1898, an Italian squadron under Candiani came armed for battle to claim the debt of that adventurer Cerruti, who, posing as a liberal guerrillero, robbed, laid waste to, and even went so

far as to offend the people's traditional respect for the clergy, committing dirty sacrileges. That was when an ungrateful son of Colombia, crespist<sup>5</sup> president of Venezuela, honored that Admiral who attacked Colombia with the Order of the Liberator. At which time the Colombians honored with that dishonorable Order renounced such a worthless honor.

And today that you, a journalist, Attic republican, spotless democrat, sole legal president in the Americas, have accepted that Order, we who admire you, we who are proud to be Colombians, who aspire to a respected and respectable nation, free, great and dignified, we can do nothing but exclaim, along with that famous ancient warrior who said to his commander who turned him over to the enemy: "Oh, how poorly you know your friends and our enemies".

And it is sad to say, when all of the press condemns the infamous Gomecracy, when students and workers, those two wings of the eagle-nation, protest the Gomezuelan representative, for the torments of the Colombians under the lash of Juan the Bison, the liberal police defends the agent of the autocrat, as if showing solidarity with that monstrous enemy of Colombia.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Follower of Joaquín Sinforiano de Jesús Crespo (1841–1898), Liberal and President of Venezuela 1884 to 1886 and 1892 to 1898.

<sup>6</sup> It is unclear whether this is the complete text of "Mis prisiones, Mis destierros y mi Vida" published by Águila Negra Editorial, 1929. The translation was made by comparing two, slightly different, sources: (1) Biófilo Panclasta, *el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural "Alas de Xué", 1992 and (2) *Siete años enterrado vivo*. Web publication in pamphlet form by Indubio Pro Reo (Caracas) / Publicaciones CorazónDeFuego (Medellín), n.d. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# Seven Years Buried Alive in a Gomezuelan Dungeon

## The Horrifying Story of a Man Revived

### Deflowering Memory

Words — as an aesthete once said — are nothing but the reflection of ideas. And if ideas cannot be faithfully translated into human language, then much less so can feelings.

If poetry is the music of words and music is the poetry of sounds, it is necessary to confess that great sorrows can never be expressed well, because neither poetry nor music can translate them into any language.

It's just that in certain moments the soul can only be silent. Elegies, many of them intensely emotive, like Pérez Bonal's "Ante el cadaver de su hija flor," or "Las ruinas de Itálica," are works of an imaginative, literary sorrow, more than a real, intense sorrow.

The legend of San Lorenzo, as well as that of the *Martyrs* of Babylon, who sang hymns of gratitude and adventure in the midst of the flames that consumed them, belong to biblical mythology.

No one in the midst of the torture that wrenches the bowels, that disturbs the mind, that tears one apart with pain, can even murmur plaintive groans; often even weeping dries up in the torment.

Montalvo judged Silvio Pellico as a man who lacked hatred and therefore was not a complete man. And this proves that Silvio, being unable to express his colors, as no writer in torment can, found no terms, once he was able relate them, in the human lexicon that could express everything that his soul had suffered and his heart had felt in the torture.

Silvio Pellico's *My Prisons* has the saddening coldness of a resurrected person who, after long nights in the grave, attempts to whisper his mournful suffering.

The same goes for all prison stories. The Attic and emotional Gorka, in the book that bears this title, does not appear as the master of written sorrow that he is noted to be.

Therefore, this part — the most bitter, the most hideous, the most desperate of this work of living sorrow — cannot even begin to bring to the soul the same feeling of anguish that generated it, because I am not even capable, years later, of reflecting in human language the Dantesque and indescribable scene of desperation, of terror, of Promethean agony which I endured during *Seven Years Buried Alive* in one of the *Dungeons of Gomezuela*.

To make matters worse, I have to write and publish this book, not because my pains, so poorly expressed, could interest anyone, and much less to make a spectacle of feelings as the sentimental novels do.

No! It is necessary that I make of my torments a **handful** of shit and throw it in the face of Juan Vicente Gómez and his accomplices, not as a challenge, not as an act of vengeance, but as

a final desperate gesture of rebellion, like the last foul gob a martyr spits in the face of all the tyrants and all the cowardly sycophants of freedom who honor, help and tolerate them.

The presence of this shapeless monster before the destinies of the cradle of the liberators, proves beyond hope that in this arrogant America there are neither rebel dreamers, liberal parties, nor governments that have the courage to protest even against the crimes of this fecal abortion, this outrage of civilization and shame of humanity.

I, who still do not have even a **Bohemian** lyre, which would make my ears into a switch that whips, before history, the hardened backs of the villains, since I lack the **brute's** dagger, or a **bomb in a backpack**, to rip it apart. I who have neither scraps of paper to write "the agony of a great people" with my own scarce blood, I want, with my heart's tears, with the macabre clanking of my chains, with the screams of agony from companions in torment that resound in my hell, with the stinking rags that reveal my whipped flesh, my skin-draped bones, with the mountain of excrement that asphyxiates me in my pit, to make this pamphlet into the most repulsive protest that a rebel remembering his torments could forge against the most, the worst of the semi-quasi-former-sub-men and the most bloody, ignorant and cowardly of the despots of this fecal tree, to whom they derisively gave that name now abominable for all time: Juan Vicente Gómez.

## Valencia

"Never," a blind old bohemian told me, "have my eyes admired a bluer sky or a more saddening night than that of Valencia, the gentile fairy of Tacarigua."

And I, like that singer who says, "now my eyes have seen you, my longing is fulfilled, city that I have loved since childhood, my fantasy"... I deflowered the beautiful Valencia with my restless and rebellious sole on the first of January, 1900.

As I said before, in May of 1899, I left school, violin, girlfriend and village, and I enrolled in the army of Cipriano Castro, fortunate leader who in five months managed to realize — for the second time — the epic conquest of Bolívar of the year 1813, in a triumphant march from Cúcuta to Caracas.

Falling behind the Castroist army in the village of Chengendé, loyal to my purpose and with so little rest, I kept the Caracas road, with various revolutionary groups who prowled around in the States of Trujillo, Portuguesa, Cojedes and Carabobo, loyal to the counter-revolutionary reaction that had been started against Castro by the unfortunate General José Manuel Hernández, the national strongman, so loyal, so honored, so genuinely liberal, as well as inept, false, and lacking in all practical revolutionary sense.

Hernández, after his arrogant departure from Caracas, had organized a large army which, almost victorious, was defeated on December 15, 1899 in Tocuyito, three leagues from Valencia.

Disoriented, stunned, almost fearful, I was crossing the streets of Valencia in search of familiar faces, when suddenly I ran into Timoteo Morales Rocha, this irreproachable and fearless gentleman who on recognizing me felt in his grateful surprise all the emotion of one who suddenly sees resurrected a loved one who for him was long dead.

I remained in Valencia several days, thanks to the dignifying hospitality of Morales Rocha. I went on to Caracas; those wanderings mentioned above have nothing to do with the tale that was the motive for this preamble.

## Abandon All Hope!

This book is a **fistful of delicate plants**, a **bunch of emotions**. I do not maintain a chronological or descriptive order in its stories, for I go on writing whatever at the light of memory — sometimes gloomy, sometimes glowing — delicately pours from my pen.

So the last chapter (up to 1900) ended with the — for me unfading — name of Timoteo Morales Rocha; with him this period, the blackest of my life, began and ended; he is found then — like two spiritual poles — at the beginning and the end of this terrible period.

On arriving in Valencia, 1914, after that spiraling pilgrimage toward the sunset, my need to beg imposed upon me the duty — offensive to me — of searching for Morales Rocha.

And I say that in this case, as in many others, I have not knocked on the door of a “comrade,” “accomplice,” or “friend” except when persecution, weariness, or the horror of living have obliged me to it. The thing is, **if aside from receiving nothing is more agreeable than giving**, then aside from being **forced to give**, nothing is more ignominious than to be forced to ask. “Ask to borrow a peso,” said Franklin, “and you will learn what it is worth.” And if asking to borrow is depressing, disheartening, then to **lose one’s shame** one must get drunk so as not to feel this poor affront to the gift.

The merchants of consciences, the cynical and potbellied bourgeois, who do not understand love, peace or pain, satisfied with the “shit that dominates” — as Papini calls money — disturbed by need and lust, atrophied in their pleasures by their disgusting vices, can appreciate neither the ineffable emotion felt by select souls, living spiritually, nor the horror of the miseries suffered by an aesthete of the soul who, in the same way that he lives many lives, when he suffers a deprivation, endures many agonies.

As much because liquor produces unconsciousness and dispels the soul from the presence of its own victimization in thinking constantly, as because the aesthete seeks **contemplative states of the soul**, or due to the anguish that asking causes me, or because one does not compel one whom one loves, that day I got myself sick on rum and liquor in my arrival to Valencia.

And in this inebriated, wild state, I walked the plazas and streets of the city in search of a friend, the generous and mandatory refuge of bohemias.

The European war had just erupted. I, like Juan Vicente González, feel that “every man has two countries: the one in which he is born, and France, the land of thought.”

And along with Schopenhauer, the pessimistic philosopher, German by birth but like all thinkers Latin of heart, I will say that “Europe is populated by Frenchmen, the rest of the world is inhabited by monkeys.”

Sincere and indiscrete that I am, that day I presented myself as a charlatan, an exhibitionist. I made a Francophile stand in some of the city’s bars, and without knowing when or how, they **rolled** me to the Police Headquarters, a cavern of human butchers, ruffians, petty functionaries, murderers and cowards.

The District Chief (as, in Venezuela, they call the bossiest person in the district — the province, in Colombia) was one Rojas Fortuol, Emilio Fernández's cousin and basically accomplice in this monster's kidnapping of another cousin of his. For committing this vile act Fernández betrayed his wife, deserted Castro, robbed the customs of La Guaira and fled with the "girl" to Colombia, thus dishonoring the refuge that this inhospitable country has often given to dignified **asylum seekers**.

It seems strange that men of action, men like Emilio Fernández, courageous to the point of delirium, always place their trust in their most vile, boorish and cowardly adherents; just as one cannot explain why Castro made that **bleating ass** Juan the Bison his first ruffian, so one cannot explain why Emilio Fernández made this whorehouse gossip, this **gambling den swindler**, the highest executive of the noble city of Valencia.

This beribboned buffoon made me appear before him and, in the tone of a sodomite executioner, interrogated me about my political ideas, the motives for my travel, the reasons for my sympathies toward France... I answered him, quiet but proud. The imbecile Governor said nothing, gave an order — they confined me in a dungeon in the Headquarters and after many days of hunger, of thirst, and filth, they transferred me to Valencia Prison.

## Valencia Prison

Epicurus did not find any sentence that could punish as monstrous a crime as matricide; he thought the most dignified thing was not to specify one. And I, not finding in the dismal vocabulary — horrendous, terrorist — a word that could designate this human pigpen, **this grave of living burial**, this **dump**, unimaginable by the most perverted Dantesque mind and neither described nor describable — I have to indicate it with the name that they gave it when they built it: prison.

Just "prison", or better: prison-cemetery-asylum-madhouse, because even though this building was constructed for promiscuous imprisonment, since there isn't a prison for women or children, they lock up or bury all the criminals, women, men or children, madmen, beggars, vagrants, lunatics, who fall into the **graces** of the great authorities.

And as there is no evil that its goodness does not enclose, this **grave of the living**, as a comedian put it nicely, "has this going for it, that in it, they only mess with you once."

As in the convents of Los Cartujos, they don't even take out the dead to bury them in the common ossuary. I don't know what they do with the victims there, but it is a fact that none of the inmates who died during my **seven years of living burial**, did I see taken out to the cemetery.

In Venezuela they take — or better yet they **drag** — the prisoners to the dungeons, like the "dying" of the Spanish villages; like fetid corpses whose revulsion drives away all passersby, since no one, depraved as they may be, wants to witness such macabre and ignominious dragging.

As for me, they **dragged** me, from the Headquarters to the prison, four or five minions, miserable brutes, insolent, repugnant. With "bare" machetes like pointed sticks for driving cattle and carrying, rolled up on each of their sleeves, the ties or **halters**, from the six or more times that they tied the "rope vest" — as they call this torture there — on me they *dragged* me through Plaza Bolívar and other streets of the city, to the terrifying grave.



Without “unstraitjacketing” me, they brought me in through the barbaric “prison guards” to the office of the “illustrious citizen colonel” deputy, Régulo Bustamante Berti.

This executioner with a “personable” face, ceremonious as a gravedigger of the convent, fatuous, conceited, well-dressed, interrogated me courteously, jotted down my name and, recommending me prudence and resignation, ordered my “interment.”

If the dead upon falling to the bottom of their grave could appreciate the horror of the first shovelful of earth that falls upon them, they would not feel the horror, the dread that takes over the one “buried alive” who falls into that grave, more beastly, more horrible than death itself.

The key master, the jailer of this living “hell,” pushed me into a cell, closed the doors, placed a guard watch at its entrance... and I fell... as into a stupor of unconsciousness, as into a state of ataxia, of idiocy, that prevented me from appreciating the full horror of the moment.

A horde as of skeletons, sounds of iron, things stumbling, returned me to the clear use of my distressed reason.

It was a group of prisoners who after the hungering day were hurled into that cell like a mountain of corpses of things to spend the night like the rags the beggar keeps under lock and key so they won’t be stolen.

There was no goal but the refinement of cruelty in locking up these dying people in a cell, the building being as solid and fiercely guarded as it was.

The prisoners who had seen me enter into the cell were careful, in their entrance, not to trip over my cold, weak body.

One of them felt with his hand my flesh, which did not shudder because I had already suffered all pain, and observing that I neither moved nor spoke, exclaimed sadly and softly, “They hung this one in the Police Station and brought him to die here.”

“He didn’t even get to try the shackles or a beating from Malpica,” responded another.

“Poor little guy... who could he be?” said a third. A terrifying silence surrounded with doleful mystery the space faded by the silent shadows. I cried...

I cried... yes, with dry tears, because the springs of my bitter weeping were exhausted and even my soul was arid from the pain.

But my sorrow was not, to be sure, the bodily sorrow of one who suffers a physical torment.

Physical pain, as intense, as acute as it may be, does not kill a man’s “will to live,” does not weaken, does not stupefy.

After a serious illness, the body remains downcast, shattered, weak, but like the leaves of a plant that sprout, a convalescent’s flowers of hope are joyful and vigorous.

Not so with the great pains of the soul. A moral torment will annihilate the strongest being. Scevola smiled in burning the hand that he punished for having missed the blow against Porcena; but, I said it before, on the rack of carceral torment, in the inquisitorial pyre, before the death of a loved one, no one is serene, no one is a hero.

I longed for death, even in torture because she will liberate me from so many deaths, from so many horrible agonies. But death is a woman: she ignores those who call her and seeks out those who fear her.

There is nothing that can compare to a night of insomnia with a great suffering as mandatory companion. We can cast everything, even life, far off from ourselves, except the mortifying thought, the consciousness of pain.

I do not believe that the torment which in certain countries ferocious murderers are condemned to — of sleeping in a semi-dark cell, tied to their victim — could make the victimizer suffer more horrendously than what I suffered on that, my first night of burial... alive...

## Black Dawn

For the anguished being, every musical sound is an annoyance; for the depressed soul every ray of light is a traitor; since it seems that in certain moments of life, silence and shadows are our only desire.

Dawn is a cherished hope in the midst of the darkness of the night for the anguished patient, for the hasty traveler, for the gowned bride, for the sailor in the storm, for the lark in its nest.

But for me, who loves so much, that infant rose of day, in that hole and in that hour, the light of the dawn was like the dying flame of a fire where my mother's remains were being charred.

And so it was that sad autumn daybreak.

Timid rays showed to my disturbed vision a mass of human things, starving hordes who entered furtively in search of corpses; their hideous sight placed in my soul an obsession with suicide. To die! Yes... What happiness! Death is always compassionate because it is always the *cessation of pain*. To die is to conclude. It is the loss of the soul's consciousness. It is the supreme liberation. Life, the sole positive truth, is beautiful, good, desirable, when from it, as from a farm, we can make a garden. But when life is a torment, it is a wound that some executioner tears into us, when *life is no longer life*, then death is a final parting from man's only duty: *making yourself happy*.

But even though Alfonso Kais affirms that of life's desires none is easier to realize than death, that the resolute man can always realize this longing, it is not true.

In my case, for example, suicide was impossible: I lacked any instrument, equipment, clothing to wound myself or hang myself, and moreover I was watched. Executioners always fight to keep their victims from dying.

I do not believe that there is a torment equal to this: to wish to die and not be able to. Death ends all pain; I did not even have this desperate consolation.

So I did not commit suicide; but the obsession of this idea in the torment I suffered has tormented me, later, even in times of great serenity.

The international press has often reported my suicide. "I don't know," the Attic Pina Chevelier told me in one of her beautiful missives, "what gives journalists the gall to kill men who think highly and suffer deeply"... What?

Because to live is to endure, and the thinker, who has many lives, has to suffer many deaths. Life is accepted as a burden, which we can leave at any time and at any step of the way.

This, and not cowardice or religious prejudices, is why thinkers who *live as if dying* do not commit suicide.

Life in itself is so useless, so dirty, so short, that if it is not worth living, neither is it worth snuffing it out.

Those bones, a mass of human things, like a monstrous serpent that awakens in a bed of spines, arose, like a single body, at the sound made by the bolts of the cells, of the prisoners who, in the later afternoon, were transferred to others, to be tortured.

My cellmates emerged, gaunt and drowsy, and, as usual, formed a line. The assistant deputy counted them and, assisted by the key master, searched them one by one, all those unhappy souls who didn't so much as have fecal matter in their bowels.

The *search* was a shameful and cowardly maneuver which the spineless and *zealous* deputy exercised three times a day to order to make sure the prisoners didn't have any weapons, needles, or pencils and paper.

To find in the pocket or fold of the body the tiniest particle of *lead* or *pencil stub* was a criminal deed; the unfortunate found with it paid for it with torture or with his life.

Why is it that tyrants, minions, all the exploiters of pocket and conscience, so fear the pen or anything like it?

Because in the life of peoples and men there are three weapons which are always terrible and often fatal for all the despots, swindlers and exploiters of man: the tongue, the dagger, and the pen.

The tongue, sharp as a knife, slippery as a snake, red as blood, scathing as a viper, flexible as an arrow, hurls, in the venom of the word, now the gall that embitters, now the vitriol that burns.

And the tongue has two forms that take its place in its vengeful labors: the dagger, sharp like the tongue, treacherous, fine, and the pen — like the dagger it is of steel, the only inflexible metal, sharp, ruthless, cold.

"I would rather suffer a storm in the sea than one of Danton's oratory discharges," exclaimed a noble of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

"I am more afraid," Philip exclaimed, "of Demosthenes, than of an enemy army. This is the conquering power of oratory. Orators are scarce — "the number of drainers of the pen is greater."

"My pen — it killed him," Montalvo cried proudly, referring to the death of García Moreno, the Ecuadoricidal Jesuit. His pen was a decapitating knife. Tyrants fear punishment, as the vampire fears the light, the thief his judge, the whore the hospital visit.

This is why the minions, ruffians and swine at the service of the despots know that the most promising way to flatter their masters is persecuting, reporting, oppressing journalists, orators and rebels of whatever ideal, band or nation.

The quixotic *Régulo* knew that these fecal inquisitorial *disgraces* would give him prestige in the eyes of his two filthy masters: Juan Bicho and Emilio Fernández, the fake parricide.

The morning's requisition completed, the prisoners swarmed around the patio-shithole of the *gomezmorra*,<sup>1</sup> like hungry worms around a purulent wound.

Delousing themselves, scouring the mangy members, bobbing on trembling knees, was the occupation of most of the dirty inmates.

Some joked with the indolent decrepitude of the resigned. A few meditated. And many, underhanded, cunning, sagacious, spied for the least gesture, the most suspicious word to report to the colonel or the deputy.

These vile denunciations were received with delicious satisfaction by Régulo, who never heard the accused. The shackles, the clamp, the cell were the result.

I remained in the cell where I was locked up the day I entered for some twenty-nine months. By day I was alone, incommunicado, with an *imaginary* prisoner or guardian to pass me the "food" and above all to spy on my *sighs*.

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<sup>1</sup> A combination of Gómez with *mazmorra*, "dungeon."

Gómez supplied the “food” — because I have to call that *rancid filth* something, that stingy mess as the prisoners called it — through the direct channel of the Deputy, who performed the roles of jailer, insolent, cowardly, despicable. Régulo Bustamante Berti was the name of this wretch. A good name, Régulo.<sup>2</sup>

Around the month of December 1916 they took me out of the cell and allowed me to spend the day in the patio.

The prisoners, many of them learned, some heroically generous and all compassionate and innocent as prisoners, felt for me a certain admiration not unmixed with curiosity, since they had read tales of my life in the foreign press or had heard, from the prisoners who accompanied me at night, moving references.

In the patio I made joint and fraternal friendship with the prisoners most in affinity with my rebellions, feelings and desires... Among the companions in martyrdom whose memory my own fame is able to keep alive, I will reveal to my readers the names of Manuel Canuto Rodríguez, an ingenious and manifold man, peon as an artist, master of everything, obliging and talkative, timid and credulous, rebellious in ideas, conformist in practice. A human synthesis of everything, mediocrally.

Ramón Acosta y Mendoza. Ardent temperament, scathing tongue, prodigal heart, lush intelligence, suspicious, distrusting, incredulous. Practically a charlatan, rebellious sectarian, mental audacity, many ambitions, little learning, dynamic and unpredictable. In sum, the tropical attorney type, with a prodigal and rebellious hand of Lucifer.

Doctor Sánchez, his name was changeable. A Molière-style doctor. Frank nature, generous hand, uncultured mind, malleable ideas, revolutionary for sport, “lancer” of heart. Happy and decisive.

Tomas Mercado, General, always ready to *take up arms*; onetime soldier; good-natured, military man by occasion, rancher by trade, an intelligent illiterate. The model good man. He died of hunger in 1918.

Damaso Montero, a kind of human monkey, funny and ironic, valiant and tenacious. Revolutionary by occasion, Mochista by conviction, loyal and sincere. I left him, in 1921, dying of misery.

General Pedro Teófilo Vargas. A fighting man; a gambler by profession, astute and honest. Not too charitable, not at all cultured, somewhat reclusive, taciturn, valiant, worthy. He died of hunger in 1921.

César Ibarra, a man of discretion, honorable nature, modest spirit, measured and cold. A leader of many, an occasional businessman, intelligent, not greatly cultured. He managed to save himself... in 1917.

Luis Osorio, gutsy warrior, daring soldier, rebellious by seduction, unfertilized mind. Mute because of a gag, unerring due to incarceration. He died in the midst of horrible torments in 1919.

Pedro Piña, bandit type, lively, resolute, reckless, selfless as soldier, reserved as companion, rebellious without culture or ideals. A kind of Maceo at the service of passions and vices. He was finished off with club and rod in 1921.

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<sup>2</sup> Régulo means the head of a small state.

General Simón Colmenares, chubby, sociable, quiet, untrusting, generous, frank, loyal. Of resolute spirit, of audacious will. Uncultured but intelligent. Dying destitute in the prison of Valencia, he died of hunger in the fortress of Puerto Cabello in 1921.

Alberto Mata, Cuban in origin, merchant by profession, political by force; rebellious to the death. Of moderate education and scant generosity. Attentive and accommodating.

Octavio Rodríguez, gossip, cordial, faithful, merciful and lazy, stranger to war, hard-working and timid. Of little knowledge about anything. A sly man.

Maximiliano Dorta, chivalrous, a vain and lively uproar. A civil soldier of conviction. A contemporary revolutionary. A conservative base with liberal ideas. In prison, he suffered greatly for his independence and neurasthenia. He was deeply martyred. He died of physiological misery in 1917.

## The Mass Grave

The political prisoners were no more than seventy. Among others, in addition to those listed above, I remember the names of General José Antonio Barreto, Juan Tavera, Julio Sánchez, Luis Eudoro Medina, Eduviges Tacoa, Coronado, Pacheco, Morón, Verito, etc., etc. Between the men and the women, there were some twenty “criminals”; and I the strangest for those who knew that if in “Colombia the law is a dog that only bites the poncho wearing people<sup>3</sup>,” then in Gómezuela justice is a spiderweb that only traps disaffected Gomistas<sup>4</sup> or miserable devils. The strangest thing is that almost all of the legal prisoners were youth from families that were bourgeois, cultured and more or less wealthy.

In this moment of the pen’s swift running, I remember Raúl del Castillo, Nuncio Orztoni, Pedro Zargazazu, Chucho Borges, Richardo Ortega Lima, Manuel Silva, Acisclo Baquero, the Marquesita de Mijares, Rómulo Maduro... Pedro, an exquisite poet whose verses were later published. And among the charged women, Trina Jiménez, the “prison’s tragic muse.”

Also lying there, heaped in stinking promiscuity, were madmen, madwomen, beggars, vagrants, idiots... a whole disgusting array of human misery... Two “Apaches,” caught red-handed in robbing the State Treasury, lay like sacred hostages who taught the monstrous President Fernández their exotic arts. They were not granted any inquiry; after brief months, they were deported.

And “criminals” like them lived together with those imprisoned for noble causes, thus confusing the selfless pride of the soldiers of freedom with the most vile murderers, since for Gómez, Fernández and other beribboned minions there does not exist the sense of selection that can distinguish the monstrous from the beautiful. In Gómezuela, the most horrendous crime is to not believe in Gómez and his underlings as gods.

Also lying there arrested were the pimps of the Bison and his henchmen, who were to be punished with the most humiliating of insults—as one of these vile men said—that of being locked up along with Gómez’s enemies.

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<sup>3</sup> The poor.

<sup>4</sup> Supporters of Gómez.

## Hunger!

"Hunger: it is," Dumas exclaimed, "the most horrific human word."

Hunger has been and will be the generative cause of all the crimes, graves and monstrosities recorded in History.

Sorrows, says an old refrain, with bread, are sweet. And it's a fact that of all life's torments, there is none more horrendous than hunger.

To die in combat, to die on one's feet, is glorious and even desirable; to die of sickness, accident, even dying on the gallows is upsetting, but in the end we die as we are born, unconsciously.

But to die of hunger, to feel the tearing of our entrails like a hand ripping them out from inside; to contemplate the slow consuming of our life, as if our limbs were grinding us up one by one; deliriously envisioning, in desperate agony, rivers of milk, cascades of wine, seeing soaring banquets, bread being offered, in a word, enduring the death rattle of hunger is the most horrific human end.

And this is the kind of death that Gómez's dungeons specialized in.

Emilio Fernández, among all his State agents, was the one who most faithfully fulfilled the nefarious mandate. And Régulo Bustamante Berti was the one called to carry out this torture, finishing his victims off with hunger so that they had to live, like the dogs in the Bible, off of their own vomit.

Régulo got from Fernández the miserable ration of fifteen cents which, in spite of being so stingy, remained in its totality in the *pockets* of the vile executioner. He barely entertained aiding the agonizing hunger of hundreds of prisoners with the daily allotment with which he sustained one of his vile concubines.

This monstrous process was in agreement with the foul deed of the Bison, who to award him for his crimes named him Civil Chief of the Capital District of Carabobo. But, as he did not want to leave his disgusting and lucrative carceral gravy train, he left in his replacement as interior Deputy his boorish Assistant, Jesús Maria Acuña, a dove's egg, a good kid that the vipers' nest transformed into a serpent.

Régulo had barely taken over his Chieftdom when he took up the dog's work of persecuting, imprisoning and torturing as many "citizens" as were suspect, even cooling in the faith sworn to the Bison.

But Fernández did not appreciate this dutiful attitude which demerited his "guard dog" zeal and, feigning the pretext of Gómez's indignation over the escape of prisoners from the prison, he went ahead and returned there as deputy.

But, before and in order to take away his disgusting stolen income, stolen with the prisoners' misery as a consequence, he sent almost everyone to Puerto Cabello Fortress. There hardly remained some twenty in the dirty dungeon, among us Luis Eudoro Medina, Cesar Ibarra, Timoteo Morales Rocha who had fallen into the system some years earlier and lasted three more.

Corncills says that a friend, in the noble meaning that this term entails, is the highest present that the gods can make to a mortal.

Socrates thinks that the friend is another self. "Your brother," says Seneca, "is your friend; your friend is your brother."

Jesus said, "Your brothers are those who think, love, and suffer, as we ourselves think, and suffer and love," which means that the bonds of the spirit are the only truly fraternal ones; the friend is a spiritual brother.

Not in this age — market of consciences, whorehouse of characters — but in those called “holy,” have blood brothers *not* been in history models of nobility or loyalty.

The Bible is a paragon of fraternal wretchedness. Cain kills Abel: so begins the life of man upon the earth. Jacob tricks Esau, Joseph is sold by his brothers. Contrast those with the example of Antonio, sentenced to death; guaranteed by Rogelio, he obtained a last-minute allowance to say goodbye to his absent mother, and was late because of a rising tide. At the very moment that Rogelio was going to be executed in his place, Antonio presented himself and, to the amazement of the public, there began between them the most self-sacrificing dialogue, in which each only fought for the right to die. “I was the one condemned,” Antonio exclaimed, weeping. “No!” Rogelio shouted in anguish, “I was the guarantor,” he added, “you were late and I should die.”

Of Morales Rocha I could well say that if he had not been the only friend in my life, he has been the exemplary friend. I said this part of my life, *seven years buried alive*, oscillated between two extremes: *Morales Rocha sought by the captive* and *Morales Rocha my liberator in 1921*.

Practical liberal, idealist revolutionary, decent man. Morales Rocha could not take any more of corruption in that hurried feast that was called “Venezuelan Rehabilitation” — swell of mud, born of a betrayal, maintained by the vileness of a swarm of voracious eunuchs, supported by corrupt governments, imperialists, monastics.

In Gomezuela one did not need to be “suspicious” to be imprisoned. The Bison’s minions proceeded under Torquemada’s criterion: “better to mistakenly imprison than to guess and set free.”

Morales Rocha was imprisoned, I believe it was in 1917—I repeat that in the midst of the shadows’ terror where I was in agony, the concept of time is lost. Moreover, this sought-after prisoner had to be mysteriously kidnapped.

I saw, through the darkened space, there in the dim distance, someone moving like a bundle of bones which shook in the emptiness like the standard of a shipwreck’s banner.

Someone named Blanco, a former Police Commander fallen into disgrace and “placed in the shadows,” assured me that the hand was that of Morales Rocha, since he had helped defend him days earlier.

Morales, although educated in Bogotá Schools, vaguely remembered the “language of the hand” that the students use to communicate from school to school, between friends and between lovers.

And after long practicing letters, simulating forms, we managed to understand some words. I remember with astonishment that the first phrase that Blanco, I, and the other prisoners in the cell understood was the macabre “we are fucked.”

It was February 20, 1918, a day when a flock of minions repeats any name offered by Gómez for voting in a new President of the State. Such is Venezuela’s federalism. This federation is one of so many lies with which the people have been tricked and defiled.

Emilio Fernández, the bastard son, the flagellator of Father Briceño, his corrupting engenderer; Fernández, traitor, thief, murderer, kidnapper, vile, for the third time was chosen by the Bison to rule the fate of the highest and most cultured of the States of Venezuela.

Lovely alternating regimes! Lovely Federation!

Yes, the depressing “O! freedom, how many crimes have been committed in your name!” makes one doubt even the most noble ideals, from the glorious, Christian, redemptive foundations of the parties like those of “Freedom and Order,” “God and Country,” “Peace and Work,” and worst of all the cynical and despicable “God and Federation,” the moral basis of Venezuelan federalism,

proves to us that mottos, colors, flags, principles and ideas are just vile scarecrows of criminal politicking. "We're fed up!"

These ten gestures, this handful of anguished and macabre signals, these signs of terror, a kind of *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*<sup>5</sup> trembling in the depths of a mildewy jail were, in effect, the horrifying sentence of our bodily *quartering, desolation, shredding*.

One thousand ninety-six more days... Twenty-six thousand, two hundred eighty hours (26,280). One million, five hundred seventy-six thousand, eight hundred minutes. Horror! Horror! Horror!

Whoever has anxiously waited for a day, whoever has felt the anguish of an awaited appointment; the quiet lover, the prisoner of a law-abiding country, knows how desperate is the torturous succession of minutes in waiting; they know how hopeless it is to hope!

And there are hopeful expectations; but at the bottom of a grave, without any water but what falls from one's eyes, without any light but that of one's afflicted mind, there, all hope is laughable, because they know Dante's inferno, that sinister door where the writing declares "Abandon here all hope!"

## Escape!

Because of the remittance of prisoners, the new Deputy took down Morales Rocha from the mysterious cell and buried him in a cell where, though he was incommunicado, we managed to speak with him furtively.

Rebellious and dynamic, intelligent as he is, he hatched an escape, which could indeed be compared with that reckless one of the Count of Monte Cristo.

Cesar Ibarra, Eudoro Medina, with Corporal Mijares, following Morales Rocha's instructions, managed to open a breach in the cell which opened onto the backyard of a quasi-isolated house.

But Medina and Ibarra, cowardly and untrue, fled alone once the narrow gap was open, leaving their selfless and suffering companions in the hands of the infuriated executioners.

The fugitives were denounced by the neighbors, who did not dare to arrest them. In Gomezuela, denunciation is a duty like that of the confession of sin, but retribution is almost never fulfilled.

At the unexpected scandal, the jealous Governor, former-Deputy Bustamante Berti, arrived in haste. Armed with an unsheathed machete that flashed like a rocket's trail, the irate "*bosh*"<sup>6</sup> went straight to the prison's patio and gave out wallops with the flat part like he was beating hides; he wore out his arm and the machete, but his soul, full of fury and servility, did not cease to radiate insults through his eyes and mouth.

Finally the fearfulness ceased; he locked up the two dozen unhappy captives in a cramped cell and left. They deposed Corporal Mijares, and Fernández deposed the Governor, who he did not look well upon, under the pretext that the prison needed him as a model Deputy.

And then he provided "edible food," played with those who knew how, gave us news of the war, he celebrated Christmas Eve with us, with music, dinner and drinks. Finally, he was transformed.

It is a fact that must be confessed: this executioner shared, on many occasions, just as Fernández, Acuña and Galvis did, gestures of piety and even high manifestations of sympathy and generosity for my disgrace.

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<sup>5</sup> "Writing on the wall."

<sup>6</sup> The original "*jeje*" is a play on *jefe* (boss).



In this case, and without ignoring or personally forgetting his possibly saving gifts, I will repeat Mármol's blow to Rosas and say: "I forgive you my shackles and chains, but not my brother's."

Some months later the deputy was transferred to another post and one Cornelio Vegas came to occupy the deputy position with his brother, a round, lustful and imbecilic man.

In Gomezuela there is a maniacal, vain practice of people being put in charge solely by the bosses' will. There are cases where Gómez, urged to name a *sailing ship* captain, named the first person who walked in; he designated him for the post and recommended that he not forget to bring sails for the ship; the boorish captain, who had never been aboard a ship, bought a crate of spermaceti oil candles and went off to occupy his post.<sup>7</sup>

So, Cornelio was a *butcher* but he had never set foot in a prison: he gave the *responsibility* to his stupid brother, who, seduced by a snake (not from Paradise, but a black whore, Trina Jiménez), turned the prison into a whorehouse of starving eunuchs under the whip and whims of a *zamba*<sup>8</sup> courtesan.

## Trina Jiménez

I do not believe Shakespeare that "A woman is a dish for the gods, if the devil dress her not". I am neither a feminist nor a gynophobe. I am disgusted by Vargas Villa, with the butches and yanquis; but when Woman is kidnapped from her sex, everything in her is shameful, despicable. "Woman," Lluvia said, "is uniformly a womb, which means that in her the rule of pure reason is void; her thinking is carnal." Like Soberanas, the Semiramis, Cleopatras, and Catalinas have been disastrous.

As favorites: Marozia, lover and mother of many fathers, was the scandal of the lascivious papal Rome.

The world suffers its present situation thanks to Eugenia de Montijo; and Colombia moans under the clutches of clericalism because of a vengeful woman.

The woman as sister is sublime in Nietzsche; as a daughter, Isabel Klopoth, going thousands of leagues by foot through the deserts of Liberia to ask forgiveness of her ancient captive father is to be adored; every mother is love incarnate; love, like that of Teresa de Jesús, immense, mystical and pure. "The name *mama* is so loving that it kisses your lips twice."

But, as a servant, woman is slow and cunning; as a mistress, despotic and ruthless; as a guard, cruel and servile. Trina Jiménez was a natural-born woman-executioner.

Imprisoned because of a murder committed against one of her lovers, she was locked up in this human pigsty mixture of sub-human waste.

Ready and suggestive as she was, and the only "available" female in that loveless lonesomeness, all the prisoners put their zealous male gazes on that whore, intriguing, ugly and desirable...

For her part, she used and flattered everyone, she listened to everyone, but she reserved her caresses for the "head" cocks, the deputies and guards.

Bustamante, having nothing else to do, wanted her some days. The new sub-deputy, the Andean *mulato*, like his homeland, only knew dungheap prisons, fell fawningly in love with the *zamba* and made her the prison whorehouse favorite.

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<sup>7</sup> *Velas* can mean sails or candles.

<sup>8</sup> Of African and native descent.

And all the food that was once edible was turned into swill that not even the swine of the Apocalypse could have swallowed.

Meanwhile, she ate extravagantly, plotted, slept, showed off her nakedness, laughed and drank.

I am not a moralist, nor a moral creature. I love love, I enjoy every intoxication; but that *zamba-mulata* couple fell like a miasma on this aesthete, manifesting as disgust at love.

Overall, I wasn't bad: they had me and I thought I was quieting my complaints, with my hungers filled; but I, although I have always despised the vile human herd, unworthy of sacrifices and of redemption, egoist that I am, I have always lived my personal satisfaction, I seek in the satisfaction of my self, the realization of my egoist ideal or one of my pleasures in struggling, satisfying another's need, curing my bad, procuring my good.

I do not sacrifice myself for anyone; yes, I am a rebel, revolutionary, anarchist... if I have sacrificed everything so as to raise my red protest against all tyranny, it is because my combative and sentimental nature obliges me to fight for everything *good* which for me is the *beautiful*; against everything *bad* which for me is not the *ugly*. So then, I have sought my satisfaction. No one owes me anything, just like no one owes anybody anything, not to any of the redeemers, martyrs and sacrificers who have sacrificed themselves for humanity.

I suffered, and because this characteristic was cowardly, I had to toss it from me; so I protested to the assigned deputy against this ignominy of life and of food that my companions suffered, but don Cornelio, as is the style in Gomezuela, did not hear me... and the *mulato* assistant chief and his favorite *zamba* took their revenge for my protest and, along with the former deputy, little marquis de Mijares, they confined me in the same dungeon where the unhappy Luís Osorio died of hunger.

Theories of liberating things! On August 7, 1919, the centennial of the Battle of Boyacá, the genesis of the freedom of the great Colombia, I found myself suffering all the tortures of hunger, shackles, cold, in a dungeon in the land of the Liberator.

Oh! How sterile those sacrifices were!

Oh! How false are your spirits, Freedom, Homeland, Equality, Fraternity.

But, Martínez Silva says, when there is no justice or kindness, envy makes reparation. The chief guard, Colonel Arturo Galavis, did not look sympathetically on the monopoly that the assistant deputy made of favorite lovers and looting the place; he advised Fernández, who deposed the deputies and authorized Galavis to designate a senior executioner. Captain Hidalgo, a generous, kind and thoughtful man, was chosen.

But Trina seduced and corrupted him to the point of making him lock me up in a cell next to hers, shackled, ragged, starving and submitted to the torment that she imposed on me, making a martyr of me with the false offering of her food, at times when I was dying of hunger.

And it turns out my nature, wax-like toward pleasure, is like steel in suffering; not only did I not show shame or beg compassion... but my force of resistance defeated the whore's sadistic cruelty, and, as woman is eternally enamored with every masculine gesture, she changed her attitude and replaced her insults with favors.

The deputy captain, jealous as a Turk, redoubled my torment; he condemned the door of my grave; he prohibited looking at it and condemned me to absolute death of starvation.

Having suffered this agony for five years, I began to enjoy the idea of finally ending it. But the negative will is always defeated by the instinct of preservation. The case of Deputy Cork is no exception; before announcing his hunger, the need to eat died in him.

In the delirium produced by the fever of hunger, I saw flying through the air stewed chickens, stuffed pigs, smoked fish. I saw streams of honey, of wine, of *chicha*. I watched, and, watching, I sensed, at the impetus of insanity, endless tables, served with succulent banquets.

And when I awoke, I discovered no more liquid than the water of my eyes, I did not feel any flesh but the remnants of my own.

And death took its time...

And my agony was now quite maddening.

Finally. Something like a ray of hope sprouted from my wavering soul, which I saw reflected in the ceiling of the cell; and it may be that faith is a votive force or that the instinct is a creator, I recovered courage, I caressed the hope of life amidst the shadows of my spirit, like a handful of aches, of horrors and of longings, I forged this sonnet:

*In my Ferrous and terrible dungeon  
Where nothing hopeful shines,  
I keep high confidence  
In a very free and beautiful future.  
What does it matter that starving and tattered  
Today I suffer the snare of death,  
If I see glowing in the distance  
The sun of a splendorous joy?  
Without friends, without gods, in chains.  
I despise the black tyranny  
And the stubborn anguish of my hardships.  
I do not implore compassion, nor do I despair,  
But standing I deliver the tenacious blow:  
"I have known to wait and I always hope"*

The faint light of my hope watched over the now frozen-stiff remainder of my life. A deafening noise put an echo of attention in my numb spirit.

What the believers call a miracle was not impossible. I dragged myself as far as the weight of my shackles allowed me; and with the slothful longing of one who looks in the shadows for a saving object, I looked... on the filthy ground... and finally — O Fortuna! — I discovered, wrapped up in paper, a piece of *papelón*.<sup>9</sup>

Later, much later, I felt another blow; it was a bladder full of water. I was saved.

A lady — whose name I wish to ignore — informed of the torment in which I agonized, stimulated with promises of celestial happiness, had a servant girl, who burned with romance, of whom one of the prison guards was enamored. The generous young girl put the guard's courage to the test. Despite the riskiness of his action, not wanting to pass for a coward, he accepted the request to throw some food and a bit of water in my cell, and with this combined action of souls, in love, heroic, romantic, I was saved... But only so this life of mine may be that gadfly that Socrates imaginatively put on the tyrants' backs.

A few days later, Hidalgo, seduced by the *black muse*, planned something like a conspiracy or escape... when he was having the most fun, he was arrested.

On January 12, 1920, the former deputy found himself captive in the cell across from mine, the cell of his victim... of a few days ago...

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<sup>9</sup> Sugar loaf.

To replace him, Colonel Acuña was named; this lack of men in Juan the Bison's regime of putrefaction is maddening. There the posts changed, but the men did not.

Acuña, benevolent towards me, took me out of the cell. He permitted certain labors. Some prisoners crushed rock. Others occupied themselves with something worthwhile. Morales Rocha made cowhide walking sticks to feed the "sweet and chaste nest", his home, cold and deserted by the absence of his father.

A little play and a little liquor. Once a priest even came. And I, who do not attend any religious ceremony, felt with his presence the joy of one who sees something symbolizing consolation.

Rojas Fortoul, the new governor of Valencia, visited me and confided the name of my denouncer, Hernández, an old functionary in Cúcuta, civil leader of a parish in Maracaibo, then a pimp for Gómez... on this occasion, as the originator of my imprisonment.

Several times he brought or sent me clothing, toiletries, tools, what have you. He judged that someone had informed on me to Fernández, from the iniquity of my imprisonment, from the solidarity of my "comrades." Solidarity?... Another lie among so many; neither the revolutionary parties, nor my "homeland", nor the decanted material solidarity made the least gesture for my freedom.

Victor M. Londoño was the Minister then. He knew of my internment; but he could not or did not want to do anything. "How now? Are we, the Ministers of Colombia," asked Max. Grillo, a Minister in Rio de Janeiro, "beggars for the licentiousness of thieves, Bolsheviks and adventurers who have left it?"

Oh! The fact is that Colombians outside of Colombia are the pariahs of the law, having a stepmother instead of a fatherland.

## The Monster Fell

Emilio Fernández is one of those abortions that nature shits out, so as to indicate, with these monsters, the various stages of the horror of life in the history of men.

The spurious and illegitimate son of Father Briceño, engendered also by other scorpions in a woman Omaña. Since he left all his goods to her sons, Fernández, in revenge, hung, lashed and I don't know what other awful tortures he inflicted on the old priest.

Prowler of paths, he gave up the whip of the prison guard for the knife of the assassin; going from schoolteacher to policeman and at times even pastor, he dedicated himself to all the professional bullshit that circumstances allowed.

Without ideas, principles or profession, he wore whatever emblem his robberies compelled him to. So, in Colombia, he was a conservative, in Táchira a blue, in Maracaibo a nationalist; in Caracas, a yellow *mamey*.

A flag-bearer in the blue war of 1898 with Rangel Garbiras in the Andes. In 1899, he offered himself to Castro in his glorious revolution of May 23<sup>rd</sup>. Castro rejected him. What could his reputation have been, if even in a horde swarming with Juan the Bison, Eustaquio the Black Hand, the devil, he was — rejected?!

In the end, he went on in frustration; his undeniable reckless courage made him acceptable. In Tocuyito he was wounded. After the Bison, he was named Governor of the Federal District in 1899.

In October, 1900, being in charge of Caracas, he wanted to betray and seize Castro. Castro admired him but hated him; he transferred him to La Guaira as Administrator of Customs. Fernández fled from there, making off with the money that was in the safe and a girl from Caracas...

Hiding out in Cúcuta, he made several attempts at invasion, supported by the conservative Government of Colombia, the enemy of Castro, pillar of Colombia's liberal revolution.

Castro was betrayed by the vile Juan the Bison; the latter called him, made him President of Monagas State and, in 1913, President of Carabobo. Juan reelected Castro three times; but on February 20, 1921, he did not reelect him and in his place named José Antonio Baldo.

Baldo was a young President, attentive and not at all cruel. He named a Deputy who made his presence felt. He wanted to remove from the prison that veil of mystery which concealed it. He opened the door to lawyers, established medical services; he allowed visitations; he allowed the indicted prisoners the possibility of a legal defense. In his first months the last political prisoners were released. Timoteo Morales Rocha left during those days. I was remitted to Castillo Libertador on May 5, 1921, the centennial of Napoleon's death.

"Never," said José Josquín Ortiz, "has the light hurt more strongly than when it wounds the pupils of eyes that have for a long time cried the sadness of a cruel imprisonment."

And since in the world today there does not exist a more atrocious dungeon, a tomb for the living more hideous than the graves of the monster Juan the Bison, the departure from there is a miraculous resurrection that baffles the spirit and bewilders consciousness.

Today after ten years of resurrection I still ask myself whether it is true that I have been freed from the clutches of that subhuman jackal.

But the world has been touched by the unbelievable account, the indescribable victimization of the eighty-year-old disgraced commander Juan Pablo Peñalosa, whose bodily suffering was unequaled in ferocity by any monstrosity; and I believe there arrived the moment of proving to the world that in America there exists a monster with a human shape who, to the shame of civilization, amuses himself by crushing the bones of prisoners in torment, by tearing the gangrened flesh of his victims with burning pincers, by introducing in their sexual conduits spikes that rip apart the guts.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> 1931. Translation source: *Siete años enterrado vivo*. Web publication in pamphlet form by Indubio Pro Reo (Caracas) / Publicaciones CorazónDeFuego (Medellín), n.d. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# Renaissance

“To be renewed, or to die” — D’Annunzio

To be reborn is to live.

Renaissance (rebirth) is called spring in the earth.

Resurrection in plants, renewal in life.

Peoples, like men, have unnerving lethargies; but nights are not eternal, not even in the polar regions, and after every night a dawn is born.

The Middle Ages were a night of ten centuries of ignorance, despotism, and ignominy, but after that horrifying night ten ages long came the obligatory dawn: the Renaissance.

The Renaissance was the awakening of the human soul to the dignity of life.

It was the triumph of reason against vile instinct. The victory of art against monastic iconography.

It was the resurrection of the Gospel by Protestantism, that Christianity of civilization, against Romanism, that fanaticism of barbarism.

It was the discovery of the infinite by Copernicus and the “discovery” of land by Columbus.

A poor friar, in the dark corner of a cell, thought up the combination of chemical elements and discovered the gunpowder that transformed war, which the professionals of killing could not have done.

But the greatest discovery of the dawn of the Renaissance was the invention of the printing press.

This invention alone would have been enough to free the world from the inquisitorial chains of the dark ages.

The printing press brought us the book, which regenerates souls, enriches brains, frees consciences, enlivens the spirit, comforts the soul, destroys ignorance and abolishes fanaticism.

The press created the newspaper, voice of humanity without which civilization would be a mute body.

The newspaper is the mouthpiece that irradiates light and life in souls as the sun gives light and heat to matter.

And as life would be extinguished from the face of the earth if the sun went out, so civilization would die if the newspaper were to be extinguished.

The newspaper is advisor, guide, defense, attack, shield, amusement; the newspaper is also witness, prosecutor, and judge.

The newspaper is the vanguard of civilization, the journalist its great hero.

Peoples without a press are mute peoples, therefore ignorant and servile peoples.

Even the Church needs it, supports it, and recommends it. Do not found—exclaimed Pope Pius X—more churches, pious associations, or missions; fund newspapers.

Tyrants fear the press as vampires fear light; that is why peoples who have a worthy press are free peoples.

And peoples who have independent journalists do not die, and if they die, they are reborn.

After the dark tyranny of García Moreno in Ecuador came its liberation, its renaissance, because the quill of Montalvo killed the tyrant.

In Colombia everything is not yet dead because there is still an independent press; free journalists, devoted and courageous.

But we must renew our ideals, purify the social climate, revive our noble and heroic struggles for freedom.

Like men, parties grow old; but, like the earth, they can have a springtime.

The liberal party is a faction of constant renewal; if it stops or stiffens, it becomes conservative.

The vital necessity of liberalism is to renew itself, as the phoenix must be reborn from its ashes.

The current slogan of liberalism is: Renaissance.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Original title “Renacimiento” in *La Democracia*, Bogotá, #91, December 15, 1935, page 2. Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, *el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural “Alas de Xué”, 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# Interview with Biófilo Panclasta by Rafael Gómez Picón

*He fired his Santanderean revolver, a true .38 caliber Smith and Wesson, long; three rounds rang out against the German Kaiser, in a cold Berlin morning, and he was almost executed by firing squad.*

*He threw dynamite at the carriage of the president of France as it passed the Champs-Élysées, and was sent to Devil's Island.*

*He rudely slapped the czar of all the Russias during a military interview in Saint Petersburg and was sent to the steppes of Siberia.*

*He publicly mocked the studied seriousness of the King of England and was deported as a pernicious individual.*

*He wrote terrible pamphlets against His Holiness the Pope and a major excommunication fell with all its weight on his soldiers.*

*He got drunk on contraband liquor in the company of Alfonso XIII, right at the Puerta del Sol in Madrid, and he ended up with a royal hangover.*

*He was rude with Juan Vicente Gómez in Maracay and was a guest of the Venezuelan dungeons.*

*In Colombia he cursed Rafael Núñez, execrated the Regeneration, spoke poorly of the monks and was barbarically stomped.*

*He climbed the Mount of Olives and gave his own sermon there.*

*He wandered the streets of Jerusalem and his soles were refreshed at the miraculous contact with the holy stones.*

*He walked the streets of Bombay.*

*He visited the pagodas of mysterious Asia and the mosques sacred to the cult of Allah.*

*He got indigestion from chop suey in Beijing and tasted, with the refined gluttony of a sultan, some "disillusioned women", right there in the very heart of Istanbul and Constantinople.*

*In the ghettos of Cairo and Alexandria he drank in the rhythm of exotic dances whose salacious roots go back to the remote and luxurious court of Cleopatra.*

*And the worst of it all... he was an intimate friend of José María Vargas Vila!*

*We really have to find out who this extraordinary person is. His rich story, outrageous and stunning, was the go-to theme of nannies to make us go to sleep back in the days of our infancy.*

*Who was this man, child of the parish, who so liked to make the whole world uncomfortable? In what neighborhood, in what house was he born? Where are the people who have known him? The men who, as children, went to school with him?*

*Would it be a matter of pride for the foggy city of convents, or, on the other hand, a source of scandal that would brutally wound the faith of its inhabitants?*

*What would be true in all those stories that exploded like terrible bombs in the sleepy and lonely city and excited the holy ire of the saints, provoking supplications, rosaries, and trisagions as amends?*



*No doubt it was some diabolical, infernal being, since he was the close friend of Vargas Vila, who was anathemized daily, in burning sermons from the bishop and the priests of the cathedral...*

*...?*

Six years older than this famous and dead Constitution of '86. Fifty and six have passed since that instant in, by a whimsical geographical accident, I was born in the Valley of Mis Ambrosio. My mother, in open rebellion against nature, moved me to Pamplona when I was eight days old and set up my crib there from then on.

**And the first steps...**

My good mother, Simona Lizcano, now dead, I was put in the care of some saintly aunts, lay sisters who attended to me with care and attention, but in exchange made me parade as an altar boy through the sacristies and presbyteries of all the churches in Pamplona. I was an ace at helping with mass. To think that my greatest ambition at the time was to end up as a priest! A healer of souls! What nonsense! What intellectual blindness! But it's clear enough: there is no one in Pamplona who has not been an altar boy or who has not thought of being a priest. It's the environment. And even these days, Pamplona is that way: nuns, monks, lay sisters, churches, convents. The colonial soul!

**But there was a first departure.**

Right nearby. The school in Bucaramanga. I dedicated my free time to the handwritten publication of a tiny periodical that fought the re-election of Caro in 1897. With no objective judgment and alleging this motive I was expelled by the principal, Dr. Joaquín García, the father of the current bishop of the diocese of Santa Marta and that other gentleman, that shopkeeper, who they say was the minister of mail and telegraphs. It was a violent, arbitrary, unjust measure, which forever sowed the seed of rebellion in my soul. Disconcerted and wounded in my self-esteem, I emigrated to Venezuela, laughing cruelly at my aunts, my altar boy job, my desires to be a monk, Mr. Caro, and the pedagogical ignorance of poor García. On May 23, 1899, I signed up for the army of General Cipriano Castro, who I followed all the way to Caracas.

**And how were you doing financially?**

Immensely wealthy. A millionaire! The divine treasure of my nineteen years was still intact.

**Which Cipriano would know how to take advantage of.**

One who was beginning not to believe in anything or anyone could look upon his leader with reservations. Castro was an essentially tropical strongman. With no intellectual baggage whatsoever, a fortunate machetero, he built, with audacious blows, that brilliant ladder that delivered him Caracas, defeated, that city so coveted by Venezuelan warriors since the times of Don Simón, the Great, Tononó, Las Pilas, Zumbador, San Cristóbal, Cordero, Tovar, Parapara Nirgua, Tocuyito. In Venezuela, a nation with a warrior spirit, he came to be a minor god of war. But he had no path, no program. He was ambitious towards the exercise of power, for power itself.

**What signs did your lucky star send at the hour of victory?**

Supposing that what idealists call a "lucky star" even exists? I have been one, irrevocably. In that ferocious battle of human misery that operates every day of our lives, my brain has always won out over my stomach. The wise should make it a project to discover some procedure to uproot that contemptible organ that makes us so vile. National budgets are born, precisely, in the stomach of governors and governed. No one escapes. A true disgrace. I tell you this as the personal enemy of my own stomach, that has forced me into some bad times...

Once "El Mocho" Hernández, who had risen against Castro, was defeated, I was named (beside General Eleázar López Contreras, the current president of Venezuela) as the aide to General José

A. Dávila, then provisional president of the State of Carabobo... and I entered into a new rebellion, against Cipriano! It was not quixotic. Defeated, I returned to Colombia and took parts in the battles of Peralonso, El Rosario, Carazúa, leaving for Maracaibo where a stray rumor led me to the fortress of San Carlos, that gloomy prison where, for a two-year stint, I enjoyed the pleasant company of Elbano Mibelli, today governor of Caracas.

A room in shambles, crowded slum full of smoke. Books with pages falling out, yellowing newspapers, moldy paintings, rickety tables, old candelabra, useless shoes, colorful but moth-eaten canvases.

Doesn't it sound, perchance, like a true stamp torn from the horrible, human, disquieting depths of some Russian novel?

In the background of the blackened wall, a saying in Sanskrit: "The prince of the dreams of an idol, son of Isis, in the three zones of mystery that are the three pyramids of Cheops. Khafre and Miserino and the good news of Baal, son of Osiris, god of wealth..."

**A parenthesis, Biófilo. On the fields of love... how has it gone for your plow?**

Gorki the dead answers you in my name. Listen well: "That vibrant rainbow of all feelings known by the name of 'love' was slowly disappearing from my soul, and more and more frequently the scorching flames of the evil of hate for everything and everyone grew in her; in my heart the feeling of a deep discontent appeared, the consciousness of solitude in the midst of a gray world, without life, as if mad..."

**Yes, that's definitive: "in my heart the feeling of a deep discontent appeared, the consciousness of solitude in the midst of a gray world, without life, as if mad..."**

We were in the fortress of San Carlos.

Having fled from there, I pitched my tent in Buenos Aires, and later in Asunción, not without having first traveled all throughout South America. In 1907 I left for Europe as a delegate of the Federación Obrera Nacional Argentina [National Argentine Workers' Federation] to the Worker's Congress in Amsterdam. I delivered a harsh speech which included sentences judged offensive to Queen Wilhelmina of Holland and, by decree of her government, I was delivered to the Colombian delegation of the Hague Congress, which was also meeting then. The delegation was made up of Jorge Holguín, Santiago Pérez Triana and Marceliano Vargas, who funded my trip to England. It was a great little scandal.

Once Don Jorge was informed of my humble origin and my first, clerical, education back there in faraway, monastic Pamplona, his curiosity stimulated by the (for him) incredible evolution that had taken place in me, he celebrated an exchange of views with me. It was but a pleasant conversation smattered with tell-mes and I'll-tell-yous shot out like harmless spears from our opposed ideological camps. Saying goodbye, I said to him: "I leapt from being a Pamplonese altar boy to a Nietzschean anarchist" and he shook my hand, effusively adding: "It seems inconceivable. Here we are in the twentieth century and you, Biófilo, are the man of the twenty-fifth!" Well, Don Jorge's jokes...

I knew well there were no warm bodies in England. Their traditions, their uptight customs rarify the climate of a great human beehive. I went on to France; the police there, communicating with the Spanish, set the ruse into motion: from France to Spain and back again. The shadow of Queen Wilhelmina was after me. It would not leave me in peace. Finally, Monsieur Mennier, that terrible journalist who defended Dreyfus, published an article about me in La France out of Bordeaux, entitled "Les Epaves" and Premier Clemenceau finally tolerated me in Paris. I was extended a special invitation by some workers' organizations; I went to Marseilles and, as was

always happening to me, the Colombian consul in that city invented a thousand lies about me and succeeded in getting me expelled back to my country. I was forced on board the Citta de Milano. It was the persecution of my ever-irritating country against my humble person, even in civilized Europe.

### **And back in Colombia?**

My country's police did not allow me to disembark in Puerto Colombia and they even helped me get to know the great quality of their clubs. Due to these shocking expressions of such cordial antipathy, I was taken to Puerto Limón, Costa Rica, to once again begin my melancholic pilgrimage through the lands of the Americas, preaching my ideals of equality and human fraternity based on the defense of workers' interests. Cuba, Haiti, Santo Domingo, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, Puerto Rico... intense fights in the press, speeches in the public square, pamphlets, the founding of workers' centers... and everywhere, off to jail. How else can you explain that I have known around five hundred jails as a prisoner, all for shouting out the truth... my truth!

Even Don Ramón González, during his famous "Christian Year", threw me out of the country, for propagating dangerously anticlerical ideas, so he said. [...]

### **Did you return to Venezuela?**

It was in 1914, after visiting distant lands of the Orient, and sure enough, I went right to enjoying the delights that Juan Vicente Gómez was dealing out in his darkened dungeons. Seven years buried alive there! Scrawled into one of the oracular walls — even now I think I can see it! — there was a legend, a kind of desperate prayer or lament from the depths, below a Christ who seemed to be crushed under the weight of his cross: "We suffer more than this Christ carrying the weight of his cross..."

Wishing to erase the blurry memory of all my tortures, I left for Sao Paulo, Brazil, where I efficiently aided in organizing a huge, just and necessary coffee-growers' strike. Along with one thousand five hundred Europeans, I was deported to the deadly region of Oyapok in Brazilian Guyana. It was human injustice, implacable, intolerable, always the same when she enthrones herself anywhere on the earth. Fleeing from there, I went to Cayenne in French Guyana, where the League of the Rights of Man sent me to Martinique. And I returned to Colombia, after having visited fifty-two countries and close to a thousand cities.

### **So much material for memoirs...**

I have published a book: *Seven Years Buried Alive in one of the Dungeons of Gomezuela* and two others are at the printing press: *My Prisons, My Exiles, and My Life* and *Her Husband's Beloved*, this last being the story of a painful, well-known, and tragic Pamplonese idyll.

### **The most recent adventure, the last?**

A man loses the sense of adventure as he advances in age, that is to say, when she drags him by the nose ring en route to becoming a eunuch.

Despite all that, it was a small adventure, laughable and comic, a kind of harmless imitation of my greater adventures.

This year, I decided to go to spend Holy Week in Pamplona. On Friday, at the lunch hour, when the small hotel where I was staying was packed with guests, I stood on a chair and began a lay sermon with these modest words: "The exalted redemption of Christ was a lie. According to the Biblical legend, because of sin, — 'certainly very original', as Madame de Pompadour would say with such grace and intonation — committed with no shame by Adam and Eve in paradise, Jehovah condemned the former to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow and the latter to birth

her children painfully. Jesus came with the very laudable intentions of redeeming humanity from this extreme sentence, but the facts show that the Man-God's sacrifice was barren, especially for the poor, since the mother is now freed from the pain of childbirth by means of painkillers in the famous 'waking dream,' in maternity clinics, while men still continue earning their bread by the sweat of their brow..."

Having arrived at this point in my speech, the hotel's owners threw me out, indignant, calling me blasphemous and insane. They did not recall that, as Dr. Anselmo Pineda said "a madman is one whose madness does not agree with others' madness" (they called him a madman in his country too). Naïve lay sisters who did not understand my word. It's what I was telling you: Pamplona is the eternal city of the north of Santander. Eternal in its cobwebs and manias. That pair of lay sisters is its symbol. To shut me down, just when I was getting going! So to avenge myself I left for Pamplonita.

**But still... it is the good old homeland...**

That's right. These are family quarrels. In Pamplonita I made up with her. What euphoria I felt in my spirit, what joy pouring into the most hidden recesses of the soul! How much beauty is packed into something so lovely, so expressive, so moving, so many-hued, as our northern landscape. How saddening it is to return after so many years to the enchanted places where our childhood unfolded. It is very painful to recall the past. Childhood is a garden of dreams that time transforms into a wasteland. It is the evening of life, thin and bony before the distant and rosy morning of youth. Despite my love for progress, my faith in the whole of civilization, I have felt some deep unknown weight, some infinite anguish traveling on the new roads, these scientific and standardized highways that cross through my Santander. They invite the evocation of its old and capricious railroads, its straw huts, its characteristic muleteers, its little inns, its inviting and naïve peasant women, its monstrous jungles, its gentle valleys, its barren fields... its bubbling streams.

Yes, it's the good old homeland! Apologies to the lay sisters.

[...]

**Biófilo, what is the supreme ambition of your life today?**

To slap Benito Mussolini, assassin of defenseless Ethiopia!

*And just as the onetime altar boy began to transform himself before me into an apostle of truth, and my spirit threatened to bleed as if from the slightest injury, I quickly and cowardly exited his small and messy room.*

*He remained there, Biófilo, defenseless shipwreck, hopelessly lost in a choppy and roaring sea of memories...*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Originally titled "Biófilo Panclasta" in Estampillas de timbre parroquial. Ed. Renacimiento, Bogotá, 1936, pages 96 to 112. Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural "Alas de Xué", 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# On the Way

(for *El Diario Nacional*)

Traveling... so the poet says, is an instinct, the same in certain birds as in certain beings.

We who suffer from the same illness as Lord Byron, Bolívar, and Gómez Carillo; locomaniacs, we feel the anxious need to wander, as birds feel the anxious need to fly.

In every journey there is an authentic contrast between the weight set in the soul by leaving behind what we have possessed, and the anxiety to possess what we desire.

There are beings like Kant, who have never left their native city,

and others who wander sempiternally, because

Journeying, always journeying, such is my luck,

and on the way in my rustic path

I am an eternal pilgrim

who only seeks out a desirable death.

Cities, like humans, have souls, and none is the same as any other.

There are cold and honest cities like cloudy London; smooth and frivolous ones like Paris; lovely, hospitable, and joyful cities like Rio de Janeiro.

But every traveler, arriving at an unknown city, is like a taciturn visitor stepping on the threshold of another's house.

If everyday gazing at the same houses is monotonous and shocking, seeing strange beings, hearing unknown languages, looking out at new horizons, has something inexpressible of sorrow and disenchantment about it.

But what is most saddening is to return to the enchanted places of childhood after many years.

Every memory is sorrowful, when all the past is full of tearful and sad memories.

Childhood is a garden of daydreams that time transforms into uncultivated land.

Contemplating, in life's tired afternoon, the enchanted places of childhood is like evoking, in a moment of agony, the delights of love.

Oh! Dante, you have said it:

there is no greater sorrow

than in times of misery

to remember the better times!...

That is why, despite my love for progress, my faith in civilization as a whole, I felt some unknown weight when turning onto the new roads in the Santander byways, the beloved land that rocked my cradle.

I dropped dewy tears of yearning, in my nostalgia, on the old bridle paths, the straw huts, the characteristic muleteers, the Chinese-style inns, the healthy peasant women, the withered forests of yesteryear, the dew-pearled paths and fields.

And the noise of the bus, the hallucinatory parade of landscapes along the road, the noise of the horn as the charmlessness of traveling, which became for me a torrent of the dusty storm: these things I placed in my nostalgic and sorry soul.

Someone said: today, we don't travel, we arrive; and for a businessman or a firefighter this is good and necessary.

For those of us who feel life as a parade of visions, as a dance of hours, for... those of us for whom nature is an open book, whose pages, to be enjoyed, must be read with the effusiveness of a magic spell, hurricane trips are like the overflowing of a torrent, like the stampede of a horse on which we are fearful riders.

On wheels, I went from Bogotá to the Táchira, traveling at the slow pace of the rowboat traveler; I left Cúcuta, the oasis city, as always so wealthy and festive, warm and sleepy, so free, sincere, and frank. Cúcuta offers the traveler the heart of the Venezuelan, the frank character of the Colombians of Santander, and the ingeniousness of Bogotá.

The sun of their always heated sky has placed in its children the flame of inextinguishable enthusiasm, and in its women a heart of fire.

But, as the traveler climbs after the San Rafael bridge, the temperature begins to drop.

If, as Humboldt said, in Colombia, with an earthquake and a mule, one can see every climate of the earth in a day, I would say that a traveler with a certain psychological sensibility and with an observing eye, can, in those diverse places, in one day find souls of every mental type, of every age, race, culture and nation.

In the coffee-producing regions of La Doña Juana Bochalema, Ragonvalia, people are calm, laborious, and serious; their liberalism is sectarian, they are brave and lazy, but neither cruel nor backward.

In Pamplonita, land of the leafy cabbages, people are modest, don't do too much politicking, and are somewhat indifferent; but the village is a backward, grumbling grand-daughter of Pamplona, the grandmother city, cold, routine-bound, demure.

Uribe Uribe used to say that Colombians drink for any reason and that feast days seem to be celebrated more in honor of Bacchus than any other saint. And I say saint, because pagans had their calendar, which the Roman calendar had not entirely eliminated, seeing as how the days of the week are named after pagan gods (for example: *Martes* (Tuesday), Mars-day, god of war, Venus, god of love, Mercury, god of commerce and thieves, etc., etc.).

So I spent the holy days in the pleasant company of the mayor and judge, Mr. Moisés Jaimes.

It seems that the priest did not much like that we did not celebrate our "Holy dinner" in the church. The liberals of Santander seem to want to give the lie to Antonio José Restrepo when he said that in Colombia the nobles can be told from the reds in that the former drink in the middle of a liquor store and pray under the bed and the latter pray in the middle of churches and drink under the cot.

Pamplona, despite the highway, the telegraph, electric light, etc. is still a colonial city. It has more churches than factories and more priests and monks than workers.

It is a place of learning, but monastically; the educational institutions are run by clerics, almost all of them foreigners. I remember that when the Eudist fathers arrived in 1894, almost none of them spoke Spanish, even though they had come to teach Spanish grammar.

Pamplona's workers are honorable, frank, and of a liberal mindset. Among the technicians and intellectuals I would mention: Lamus Girón, Martín Carvajal, Luzardo Fortoul, Carmelo Pulido, Milciades Peralta, Pacho Blanco; let this memory go out as the homage of my gratitude to their hearts of Assissi.

From Pamplona to Chitagá, the narrow, abyssal, and torturous highway has only one dangerous part; it goes from where you leave to where you arrive. The carriages that move through there defy the jaws of the abyss.

Five days before I came through, a bus came off of it, the passengers all dead and in pieces. And the strangest thing is that these events do not happen every day.

From Chitagá to Málaga the travel is monotonous, cold, and faint-hearted. The panic of the Almorzadero, where the sky never stops crying, the earth always sighs, the cold bites. And in every crossroads of the torturous path, a cross marking the sacrifice of some defenseless victim, immolated by vile greed, theft, or mean sectarian passion.

Travelers, overtaken by fright, as they invoke the macabre memories of terror, or, as they hear the solemn pronouncements of scenes of horror or death from other travelers, close their eyes in fright, mumble prayers, or cover their heads.

What a difference in the short span of a few hours between Cúcuta, the happy, wealthy, and warm city, and this inhospitable, frozen, cruel land.

But just as the dawn is never more beautiful than after a night of shadows and pains, the traveler, after the anguishes, horrors and miseries of this Dantesque road, finds on arriving at the city of Málaga, a veritable oasis: the Hotel Manrique.

This traveler's asylum, tourist oasis, refuge of intellectuals... is — due to its rich comfort, elegance, exquisiteness, artistic service both to the bedroom and dining room, varied foods, well-chosen employees, flowered sitting rooms, Apollonian living — if not the best, one of the best hotels in Colombia.

This hotel, situated in a small Colombian city, was not built with business or profit goals — no! Its builder and owner, the hotel's administrator, is a tireless patriot, a loving son of Málaga; an artist with a pragmatic and civilizing sensibility. His name is Francisco Manrique.

As, in Colombia, highways are not built for usefulness and growth of cities, but for political or commercial ends, or those of petty power, the design plan of the North highway was to run from Enciso to La Concepción, leaving the lovely Nueva Málaga (so worthy of its sister, the gracious Málaga of Spain, of whose garden, Andalucía, Málaga is a lovely, flowering rosebush) to one side.

A pro-Málaga highway meeting, of which Mr. Francisco Manrique was the most enthusiastic member, ran out of steam when it was just about to achieve its noble end. And Mr. Manrique, self-sacrificing and heroic, decided to build a hotel, which, in its elegance, comfort, and attractions would bring the highway to Málaga. And the highway came to Málaga, through Málaga it goes, and through it it will go thanks to the heroic efforts of its inhabitants.

But the strangest thing about this lovely and splendid hotel is that even with its exquisite comfort, it is not only available to all of its guests; its generous and artistic owner is a patron to the intellectuals that come through that Edenic city.

From me, and in the name of those who, like me, travel with their bag of dreams as luggage, and their pilgrim's staff as a weapon, let Mr. Francisco Manrique receive these lines as an admiring and grateful tribute that I place as an unfading reminder on the most noble of all altars: gratitude, and in the most noble of all tribunes: the press...

The chaotic political situation that so many times causes thousands of victims has somewhat attenuated itself, but the liberal people, with no illusions, asks itself who it is that the named author or cause of all the tragedies, Father Jordán, is still around as spiritual director of the region. He preaches against the government, holds secret meetings, as we have learned, and with two other priests prepares the holy war, the reconquest of the power of Christ the King,

and the “holy Inquisition”. It is true that Father Jordán is dead with respect to moral prestige, but it is also known that the Cid could win battles from inside his coffin.

I am as far from one side as from the other; in the semi-darkness of distance, I see all the politicking parties become fused into one. But parties, like individuals, are to be judged on their ideas and ideals. A party that preaches order, respect for all authority, but conspires in a felonious, villainous manner, is not worthy of its name, or of public trust.

Life does not turn back, not in civilization, science, or progress; so conservatism will not return to power, but liberalism must advance.

I entered Bocayá, that old clerical fief, with the natural perplexities of every time in which I feared it all, because I suffered it all. But this time it was all different: the mayors were not my passionate enemies, but my generous hosts.

Mister Obando de Soatá, Doctor Soler de Duitama, General Alvarado de Paipa, Doctor González Vargas in Chocontá, all mayors, practically liberals, had generous and loyal welcomes for me, the bohemian.

But one understands the miserable remuneration that these efficient public servants receive. The mayor of Duitama, for example, Mr. Soler, is an engineer and he himself oversees the work of paving the streets, and his salary is as minuscule as that of the mayor of Paipa, General Alvarado, old liberal veteran, who earns the ridiculous sum of 25 pesos.

Bocayá’s economic situation is not as desperate as is believed; politics is not miserly, but there, as everywhere else, one hopes that liberalism will bring about its heroic program of salvation: for a little more political freedom, for a little less economic inequality. This must be the practical program of the new liberal party; for what is not renewed is annihilated, becomes conservative, dies.

That’s it for today... *au revoir*.

*El Diario Nacional* (Bogotá) # 8105, May 4, 1936, p. 48<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Original: “En Marcha,” *El Diario Nacional*, Bogotá, #8105, May 4, 1936, page 48. Beginning with “On wheels, I went,” the text above is a draft translation which was not included in *Seven Years Buried Alive and Other Writings*. Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, *el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural “Alas de Xué”, 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.



## On the Way! From La Mesa

Traveling, as Díez Mirón has said, is an instinct, found in some birds just as in some souls.

For those of us who experience life as a parade of visions, an agonizing march and stampede toward the nothing, traveling is a renewal of the lifeless panoramas, seeking the always longed-for and never discovered self.

Cities, like men, each have their special psychic modality. There are joyful, wealthy, learned, hospitable, noble cities, and there are sad, sullen, miserly cities. But as much as we like a city, the ones we visit are always more pleasing.

“Any woman,” affirm the experts, “is always better than one’s own.” So one who lives in Paris will find a provincial city more attractive than the City of Lights.

Bogotá is educated, of mellow climate, many resources, but I get bored with its endless street noise and the saddening tears of its shadowy sky.

That is why when I get some kilometers away from it, my soul feels an inevitable delight, like someone who leaves a prison cell for a flowered and heady countryside.

La Mesa is a town not far from the capital; of average climate, its streets are made up of trees and tropical gardens; its calm and wide-open sky is surrounded by snowy horizons, from faraway mountain ranges.

Its inhabitants are hard-working, hospitable, pleasant; a coffee-growing area, it boasts 2,710,000 coffee trees and 543 estates; its agricultural products are quite abundant and varied, and its prices very fair.

La Mesa has “the true, indestructible glory” of housing the elder statesman of Colombian newspapers, *La Revista de Tequendama*, established in 1882. I say glory because the only lasting glories are the triumphs of thought, the victories of science and of reason.

Bolívar, San Martín, Hidalgo. They themselves said it, with no illusions, they “ploughed the sea” (worked in vain). Instead, the methodical combination of chemical elements by a lone scientist produced the gunpowder that revolutionized the way wars are made.

To maintain a press organ in Colombia, even when it is sponsored, is a self-sacrificing, heroic, almost suicidal task.

With the exception of some big and rich newspaper in Bogotá, every newspaper in the country lives a life of sacrifice, obsession, whim. In Colombia, or Godombia, as some have called this Yankee-papal fief, one boasts out of love of reading, of commitment to journalism, but few are those who pay for the press that they read or pretend to read.

Of Colombia one can say what Julio Camba used to say about Spain: “Here the only ones who get paid for mental labor are the monks and their henchmen.”

When I arrived at this city so close to here, I sought out the capital’s newspapers with the excitement of a “man of the news.”

With offhand determination, some business men leaf through the ad pages of *El Tiempo*; a few conservatives peek at the defamatory nicknames of *El Siglo*. But in vain do I search for *El Diario Nacional*, that mouthpiece of ideas, red herald, and despite the fact that La Mesa is a liberal

center, that its social circles are liberated and include many thinkers, fighters, and men of noble will, newspapers of ideas circulate very little out there, just as they do not circulate very much in the great centers of liberal action, of firm revolutionary convictions.

But here, just as in every town in Godombia, if papers are little read, even less is written and the educational institutions are medieval and monastic. Instead of writing everyone contributes to the erection of churches, to the support of the Catholic cult, to the needs of the parish for its own ends.

Today was the procession of San Isidro Labrador, collection, rockets and more collections... mandatory. Groups of shy girls offered red flowers to the passersby, that they, with or without pleasure, paid for to cover party expenses. This matter of ... forcibly... selling red carnations, the flower that symbolizes German socialism and also the emblem of revolutionary liberalism, resembles the love that patriots showed for the Spanish coins that ostentatiously bore the effigy of that king they so hated; a "utilitarian" affection, acidly satirized by a Spanish writer. Our little priests like the... devilish red, when it makes them money.

La Mesa has elementary schools that suffer from the same defects as every antiquated, routine-bound, monastic establishment. Lombroso believes that such schools are a kind of comatose establishment where all the blood that goes in healthy comes out rotten.

That is why the first civilizing task of the current government, the red grouping, the leftist front, is that of educating — which is to say more than teaching — civilizing, liberating the people.

"The Franco-Prussian war," proudly exclaimed Bismarck, "was won by schoolteachers."

"In Uruguay, the most educated nation on the continent," asserts Batte Ordóñez, "the president proudly boasts more schoolteachers than soldiers."

And Colombia, in the time of Salgar, Pérez, Murillo Toro, Blume, Ricardo de la Parra, brought forth geniuses and men that honored man. Today the nation cannot find a man... to be the mayor of its capital.

And it's not that there is any lack of noble will, vehement desires for progress, liberty, and lovely order; what's missing is unity of action, solidarity on the Left, and heroic civilizing determination.

In La Mesa, for example, there are men of great heart and brains, desirous to make prevail their moral ideals, those of the entire civilization that has been their crib.

I know of citizens like Misters Jesús and Alejandro Cuervo, Doctors Crisóstomo and Gregario Tarquina, José Vicente Rodríguez, Julio Martínez, Carlos Martínez, Carlos Ramírez, Braulio Roa, etc., etc., who are progressive factors, liberated minds, civilizing citizens.

La Mesa is an agricultural center, with active commerce, and despite its wealth, lovely climate, heroic liberalism, this city seems to be abandoned by government attention.

The road that leads buses to the railroad station from San Javier to La Mesa, is craggy, steep, and still dangerous. The streets and main square of the city are unpaved; the jail is a filthy and promiscuous dungeon; the schools dilapidated and poor. Even the church, despite the mandatory collections... is unfinished.

And as if that neglect were not enough, now they want to deprive this welcoming and liberal city of the circuit court, because of petty intrigues and undignified rivalries.

And I don't mean to say that the liberal government is obligated to favor dependent peoples — no. It's that its mission is to preferentially liberate, educate, civilize people that are ready for, not reluctant about, freedom.

The mission of conservatism was to catechize, to put the sheep out to pasture for God. The task of liberalism is to civilize. And there is no civilization without a complete education.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Original: “En marcha! Desde La Mesa” *El Diario Nacional*, Bogota, #8119, May 23, 1936, page 5. Beginning with “La Mesa is a town not far from the capital,” the text is a draft translation not included in the book *Seven Years Buried Alive and Other Writings*. Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, *el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural “Alas de Xué”, 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

## Letter to Alfonso López Pumarejo (II)

13 -IX- 1936 — Bogotá

Mr. Dr. Alfonso López

S.M.

My fellow thinker and fellow fighter:

I neither write nor visit presidents, magnates, or pastors.

But neither do I stop liking, admiring, defending those who are worthy of mental solidarity, even when they are to be found in inaccessible heights.

So I have no vacillation in addressing myself to you, despite your height, because now more than ever, you deserve and need the solidarity of all who have a desire for freedom and justice.

In fact, against your government, as against Azaña's, all the reactionary forces are confabulating and you have no other defenders than the self-sacrificing and sincere reds.

The burning reds, since the old so-called reds, like the statue of Lot, were petrified looking at the past.

Liberalism, says Vargas Vila, was a revolutionary ideal until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Now it has become conservative.

The most advanced modern liberals, says Henry George, are but anticlericals, which is like saying clericals from the opposite side.

Today, human struggles have only one supreme objective: "The conquest of bread."

That is why all modern parties call themselves social, even the most reactionary and conservative, like the Nazis, fascists, nationalist-Moorish-papals.

Because the bourgeoisie and the clerics, understanding that they were in mortal danger, are entering into coalition and, using false pretenses, dragging peoples against their interests and against their noble defenders.

The traitorous insurgents called nationalists in Spain rebel against a legally constituted government in the name of authority and order. And in the name of the nation, they betray its history, life, and future, entering into coalition with ancient enemies like the Moors and the usurpers of the world like Italy and Germany.

And in the name of Jesus Christ and Catholicism they work with traditional enemies of Jesus and Christianity like the Mohammedans, who kept Iberia under the empire of the Koran's commandments for seven hundred years.

In Colombia a simian party or group awaits or awaited the victory in Spain to attack the government, like any fascist. I, anarchist by nature, according to the graphologist C. S. Hernández, and "the first to bring those ideas to Colombia", according to Frailejón, despite my distance from all government, gave you the warning...

Because since 1928, I founded here the "Center for Revolutionary Union and Action" whose lemma was *Revolutionaries of all ideals, unite!*

Because since 1908 in Barcelona, Bourdeaux, Bilbao, Paris, Amsterdam, in my talks and speeches I said to socialists, syndicalists, and anarchists:

“Our struggle must be the practical application of our ideals, progressively as circumstances and men permit.”

And because I defended not a government but a practical revolutionary ideal embodied in the person of Alfonso López, which is not strange, since the ones who have lent decisive, efficient, heroic support to the Spanish government have been the anarchists.

And in the same way that the anarchists save Spain and the world from barbarism (they do not defend governments or men, but ideals), I do not aspire to anything more than a place in the vanguard of those loyal to civilization and freedom! I have eaten no government bread except the bitter bread of prisons.

My exodus across forty nations and my three hundred and some prisons prove my rebellion and disinterest.

I am bohemian but not of the palaces.

I am Nietzsche and Francis of Assisi.

I ask the powerful to give to the needy.

I am an impenitent beggar.

I am a soldier but not a military man.

I was a colonel with Cipriano Castro.

And as colonel I was recognized in 1904 when I came from Venezuela to offer my services in favor of Colombian stability against the Yankee usurpation.

But I have never gotten mixed up in political revolts or Cesaeran demagogies.

Among the hundreds of prisons I have suffered, the longest, most iniquitous and tormenting was the one I was subjected to in Gomezuela in 1914–1921.

The current government of Venezuela wants to make as much reparation as possible for the crimes the previous dictatorship committed.

I do not traffic in my torments nor do I sell my revenges.

That is why I do not make a claim or petition to the Venezuelan government,

But I need to publish my books on Gomezuela and Godombia and I have no choice but to gather feces from the sludge that the accursed satrap left behind.

Eleázar López Contreras, the current president, was my companion in arms under Castro’s command.

Elbano Mibelli was my “prison brother” in the Castle of San Carlos. And Manuel Guillermo Cabrera, the minister of Colombia in Caracas, studied with me in the School of Pamplona.

I have written all three and all three have answered, offering their loyal support.

But I have not been able to leave.

Because the sad fact is this:

The representatives of Venezuela and the Dominican Republic, doctors Angarita Arvelo and Valentín Giró, who knew me in their nations and in dignified conditions, grant me importance and gifts, and perhaps I could leave with them.

But I have no passport.

Because in Colombia I am denied even the beggar’s pouch and the pilgrim’s staff.

It is your affair, and in your presence Laureano Gómez spoke to me of my Georgist campaigns in Argentina. For me Colombia has not been a mother, but a stepmother.

For me, it is an agonizing abyss, which I can’t even get out of to realize Bolívar’s sad thought: “The best here is to emigrate.”

From Caracas I will go to Spain.

From here to Russia.

And maybe from afar I will be able to express to you the gratitude that is born in my emotive, suffering soul for the saving gift I ask of you, as a condemned man asks for his life.

It could be that tomorrow, as Columbus, in exchange for the crust of bread and glass of water he got in Rávida, gave the Spain of the convents a new world, I, from América, could give a lightning bolt from Austerlitz. Consequently, since a passport certificate that as colonel in the service of the Republic I was issued in January 1904 by the then Minister of War, General Alfredo Vásquez Cobo, existing then as it still does now at the Ministry of War, I think the Ministry could grant me a passport or something of the sort which would permit me to emerge from this abyss and save myself.

*Ma santé est en vous*—save me.

— And sending you the highest expression of my gratitude for this salvific gift, I am your solitary friend for “liberty and justice”, and *au revoir!*

*BP*

Carrera 9a. N° 4–56

P.S. I have just sent you a laconic three-word telegram, which occurred to me because of this ingenuous anecdote: Napoleon, severe, imposing, walked around his encampment. Suddenly a sergeant appears, salutes, and says to him: “Emperor, allow me to say but three words to you.” Napoleon, standing straight, says: “Well, yes, but just three words.” The sergeant, who had been wounded in combat five times, who lost his parents and brothers and properties in the defeat of Russia, takes out some papers, hands them to Napoleon, and, erect, says to him: “Read, consider, sign.” The Emperor smiled, and, surprised by the ingenious stratagem, kept the papers, considered them, raised the sergeant up in the ranks and made reparations for his losses.

*Voilà tout!*

Be my Napoleon.

Biófilo.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Originally an untitled letter. Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural “Alas de Xué”, 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

## Remembering the Past

*Biófilo Panclasta has returned to life for the tenth time, now in Girón, set up in a sugar estate. Revolutionary as ever, his style is unmistakable.*

*Today he has sent us a greeting that we appreciate, in which he writes:*

Someone said: “Of the past, what’s best is what’s forgotten.” But in the heart’s recollection, there are memories so deep that they are like the scars of trees. Time, instead of erasing them, widens and deepens them. That is what has happened to me with an old childhood memory, which makes me look upon the past with the horror of the gallows and the repulsion of a condemned man.

There was a huge sugarcane plantation, property and attainment of a rich landowner whose name bears the tragic initials T.R. I was a poor child, gluttonous, precocious, and diligent, who obeyed, worked, and ran across the fields happy and obligingly, without waiting, fearing, or owing anything. One day, overcome by tropical thirst, after arduous labor but without malicious intent I took a cane that had fallen from one of the carriages to the road. Like a tormented soul I sucked at it with delight, satisfaction, and gratitude. I had barely consumed a third when the master T.R., bearing his infernal whip, surprised me, made me leave the rest and flee under the lash of the whip across the fields, chased by the horse that this inhumane master rode.

Weak, afoot, frightened, I could barely keep ahead of the rider’s pace and I would have surely perished under his blows if providence had not left me a ditch which I fell into, thus freeing myself from being torn apart by the whip, like one condemned to the torture of the lashes, like the lowest thieves were in the Middle Ages.

I could neither complain nor take revenge and my family did not wish to compromise the friendship and alliance. The years have passed; maybe T.R. himself does not remember that tragic event. I want to and can do nothing against that landowner, but since there is so much childhood without religion or punishment; since there are so many indigent workers and so much police work on the back of just two officers, I think that there is no more justice, neither in the authorities nor in the laws; that there is no more piety in men; and that the poor man is still the pariah of the law and the rich man the hangman of life. I once called myself a valiant Christian worker; I want to raise my fighting voice to the press, because it is, today, the sole safeguard of our rights, the only defense of the people.

For me and my companions the newspapers of Bucaramanga are our mouthpieces and popular defenders. Despite our red ideals, we, the workers of Girón, see *El Deber* as an honored one among the defenseless people, accepting no compromises or obstacles before the abuses of the authorities, the bosses, anyone who abuses.

Long live *El Deber*! 5,000 more issues is what we wish for, all of us who fight, suffer, and hope.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Original: “Colabora Biófilo Panclasta: Recordando lo pasado,” *El Deber*, Bucaramanga, #5004, September 5, 1940, page 7. Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, *el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural “Alas de Xué”, 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# Poems



# Ephemera

To love is to melt.

Each lover is a sun, each beloved, a moon.  
Nature is the great cupola of  
beings beneath the vivifying gaze of the sun.  
My beloved came to me.

And was in me.

She — lives in me.

That is why she was Heliófila.

You love several (suns). Are you a comet?

Errant star, messenger of unsayable  
lovely things, your love was a twinkling.

Comets cannot love.

To love is to fight.

And they, for lack of strength, cannot be attracted.

They are rays of moving light.

Balaguero gazed at the sky and fell in love  
with the light.

That is why he is Fotófilo. But what does he love?

Your orbit is infinite.

Is love then infinite too?

No!

Love is the concretization of feelings in a chosen being.

Love is gravity. Attraction. Weight. Affinity  
always force.

And force is a concretization of active energies.

Your Balaguero is alone.

Oh, wandering star, return to your sun!

Be favorable to him.

On starry nights I dream of a solitary star,  
wandering, in love with a lost sun. It is “Her.”

But in my sidereal walk through the imagination I do not  
find you. Are you only a “little boat that retreats”?

You are like so many loves, an impossible, a dream, an illusion.

Chimera, be reality!

Be Heliófila!

*Salud!*

*BP*

*At the shores of the Magdalena, 30 March 1912.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Original: “Efímeras,” *El Domingo*, Bogotá, #166, April 28, 1912, page 3. Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, *el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural “Alas de Xué”, 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

## And Dreams of Ambition

Point blank? and that was the question — he asked again, since I launched my negative assertion against Colombian feminine intellect... I... that day underneath the cold sky of that dilated and sad piece of a sheet.

Brother. Listen to me. One of the great *errors* of humanity has without a doubt been anthropomorphism. Man, awakening to reason, had a need to explain life to himself and invented God, giving him his own forms, ideas, whims, and so on. He has continued acting this way all the way up to our times. What are morals? The critique of human actions from the point of view of our particular mental morality? In the same way, critique is but the comparison of tastes. We want to see and adapt everything to our self.

This is what has happened with women. In our need to make another self out of her, we have strained to make her identical to ourselves. And this, which is a psychic phenomenon, is also a chemical error.

Two beings of equal nature, on coming together, grow in quantity but not in essence. And the soul is exactly that: an eternally renewed essence. In chemistry, the disposition of two bodies, different but consonant, to generate a third, is called elective affinity.

Would you marry a man?

Feminism seems to me to be a Chinese-style gesture of the feminine collectivity. With respect to women's liberation, they should know that they are not a class but a sex. That alone they will never triumph. If we want free women, we first need a free humanity. That is why the cause of women is socialism.

I don't want to speak to you of love on this page. For you love is infinite understanding. And a woman understands nothing. Love is blind.

You love talent for that reason, and when you suspect a woman has it, admiring it in her, you believe in her love, in the same way that we love a flower for its perfume.

I do not hate women. Quite to the contrary.

I am in love with that human divinity.

Only in her do I not see betrayal, because love is a fire and fire devours what tries to hide it.

She never wants to dominate me. If friendship is the communion of souls, the woman who divinizes, in a fleshy god, our being, realizes with us the sacrosanct reciprocal consummation of our continual transubstantiation.

I am an artist, and my art is the drunkenness of that Lethian liquor that only woman can keep in her soul!

But because I love her... I do not want to see her as a worker, an intellectual, a philosopher, a butch. In sum, I do not want to see her deserting her sex to become something amorphous that is neither man nor woman.

*BP*

*26 February 1912. Cartagena de Indias, Santa Teresa jail.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Original: “Y sueños de ambición,” *El Domingo*, Bogotá, #166, April 28, 1912, page 3. Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, *el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural “Alas de Xué”, 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# What Colombia Is Like

(In the Apollinean album of doctor Palma Guillén)

Colombia is like you; its sky has  
the Olympic beauty of your brow  
and of your eyes the celestial form,  
it is the tropical sun of our soil.  
Of the coral of your mouth, red wish.  
The carnation drank its pure blood  
and the Tequendama in its imposing height,  
imitates the cascade of your hair.  
Of your breasts the snowy peaks are copies  
that rise up in the majestic Andes  
over valleys with flowers overflowing.  
But wealth so precious lies  
beneath facets of life so lovely,  
the soul by the monk enslaved.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Original: "Como es Colombia," La Democracia, Bogotá, #92, June 11, 1935, page 2. Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural "Alas de Xué", 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# **Writings About Biófilo Panclasta**

## B. Rosales de la Rosa: Letter to Biófilo Panclasta

Barranquilla, April 17, 1910.

Señor Biófilo Panclasta,  
c/o the police.

I do not know you personally nor do I know, with any certainty, what modern ideas you profess and what motivates your persecution; I am ignorant of the ideals that you pursue and the reach of the doctrines you defend; but I see in you a victim, a fugitive, threatened by force, a martyr of freedom, who fights for the triumph of the truth, a defender of Right and therefore my sympathies go to your cell to comfort your spirit.

The lines that are attached are the synthesis of my ideas. If they are yours as well, then we are brothers. If they are not, you are still oppressed and I seek out whoever suffers.

I salute you.

*B. Rosales de la Rosa*

—

Biófilo Panclasta

This is a name that awakens sympathies in the hearts of the oppressed.

A resounding name that symbolizes a life of struggle. A rebel name because it preaches the truth. A feared name because it fights the slavery of the free.

Praise to the indomitable! Praise to the rebel! Praise to the feared fighter who terrifies the tyrants!

Suffer, titan, for in your pain your spirit will be tempered.

Suffer, fighter, for in your martyrdom your glory will increase!

Preach, for your word finds support in the suffering of your brothers!

Speak, for your voice enlivens the fire sleeping in the heart of the free!

Write, that your words find echo in those who thirst for justice!

To struggle for freedom is to bring down the powerful.

To preach the truth is to defend justice.

Let us do this deed.

One who guards treasures loses freedom of will. The Golden Calf entangles the mind.

Let us dethrone their empire.

To be strong is to be free.

Let us unite to be strong and to combat error.

To struggle for truth and reason is to fight for life.

To defend the oppressed is to attack the oppressor.

Let us do this deed.

The abjection of the vile engenders despotism.

Let us raise our characters.

One who oppresses, tyrannizes.  
And whoever tyrannizes kills.  
War on tyranny!  
Tyrannized people, enslaved people.  
Let us free the people!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Originally an untitled letter with attached poem. Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural “Alas de Xué”, 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.



## Juan el Cruzado: Death to Biófilo Panclasta!

For fifteen years Biófilo Panclasta has been disturbing social order with his revolutionary ideas.

He has thrown the seed of anarchism in every furrow, and his thundering word has reached the furthest reaches of old Europe. Gorky, the bohemian novelist, heard terrible parables from his lips. So did Tolstoy. And Kropotkin. And Dostoyevsky.

All the anarchists, writers and non-writers, have worked with Biófilo. Because of this, in the socialist and democratic centers of the earth, it is the authorized opinion of the Colombian Ferrer that is consulted.

And his name and image have circulated in periodicals and magazines with overwhelming profusion. Even in *El Republicano*, which published a long, long, long article...

Through this we see that Biófilo has won many steps in the ladder of immortality. But to win the last one, his macabre anatomy must be torn to pieces in a scaffold.

I therefore demand that Biófilo Panclasta go before the firing squad. And the Church, conservative concentrism, and the Holy Crusade do so with me.

It's clear. The new Ashverus<sup>1</sup> of socialism is a terrible threat to civil and ecclesiastical Powers, and to popular conscience, which he so badly needs. Especially on election days.

Although the memorable Duma of 1910 suppressed the death penalty, the current head of the Executive branch must declare a death sentence against Biófilo. A dictatorial act means nothing, when every act of Dr. Restrepo has been executed on the law, below the law, and within the law.

And the death of Mr. Biófilo can bring about the moral redemption of the nation. He is one less wolf in the Lord's sheepfold. Also, it has been too long since human blood, officially spilled, has made Colombian soil fertile.

Jesus Christ already said it: "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." And my man is a rotten tree. Wherever he is wounded, he releases the virus of impiety. In his principles he pretends he is Christian, but I do not believe him. So what? Today we, the Catholics, dominate. Christianity is dead. It already stinks.

So what is the point of all these maxims that have nothing to do with the Holy Mother Apostolic and Roman Catholic Church?

Socialism? Equality? As a sincere Catholic, I am in favor of hierarchies. And therefore a rabid individualist. And I believe that those of my faith think the same way. Because — though it seems crazy — the Church is becoming Nietzschean; it evolves towards I-ism. It is right. That is the doctrine of the world today.

And to bring about individualism, to become overmen, we must get rid of all that is superfluous. And the Biófilos are superfluous.

In the name of God, of the Holy Mother Church, of monarchies, of conservative concentrism, of all the Holy Crusades of the good press and the clergy in general, I demand the head of the individual who answers to the name of Biófilo Panclasta. Death to the Antichrist, *ipso facto*!

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<sup>1</sup> According to some traditions, the true name of the Wandering Jew condemned to wander the world forever.

Death!!<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 1911. Originally published in *Maquetas* (Bogotá). Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, *el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural “Alas de Xué”, 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# Biófilo Panclasta

He is a rebel, born in Santander, the city of rebels and fighters. The novelist Gorky, in the *Jordan of Love*, gave him his second baptism: “You, Vicente Lizcano, will from today on be called Biófilo Panclasta (Lover of life and destroyer of everything)”.

Lover of life! From loving that rabid and dangerous woman, Biófilo has gone from city to city and prison to prison, without a single cent in his pocket, but with many illusions in his brain. The noble illusions of freedom!

Destroyer of everything? Yes! He has destroyed the rotten ideas of the tame of heart. That one cannot be meek. That one cannot be humble. That modesty only exists in the weak of spirit or those touched by the stupidity of the Holy Spirit (their number seems infinite).

Today Biófilo has arrived in Venezuela. In his own land, that land of Jesuits and fanaticism, he did not find a spot to land. Maybe he will find protection in the country of Bolívar. Pray to the gods that the savage Juan V. Gómez does not imprison him in the fortress of San Carlos. So be it.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, 1912. Originally published in *El Domingo*, Bogotá. Translation source: *Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural “Alas de Xué”, 1992. English translation by Ritmo-maquia.

## **J.A. Osorio Lizarazo: Biófilo Panclasta, the Colombian Anarchist, Friend and Comrade of Lenin, Who Knew the Horrors of the Siberian Steppe**

[...]

As an adolescent, he did what any Colombian citizen of the nineteenth century would have done, alternating between the rifle and the paddle that schoolmasters used back then. But the wanderlust of some unknown gypsy ancestor lit up in him, and before he was an adult, he emigrated to Venezuela. It is difficult to follow the adventures that make up the life of this great unbalanced man, who would have been a perfect character for Romantic literature, but somehow ended up as the secretary of Cipriano Castro, a grotesque strongman whom he accompanied on his wayward campaigns. That is how he traveled through the greater part of Venezuela and that is where he was when Juan Vicente Gómez, recently ascended to power, found him. Lizcano wanted to be loyal to the vanquished, who was being exiled, and when Gómez made him choose between that and the consulate of Venezuela in Genoa, not to mention the beginning of a wave of intellectuals that would praise his ferocity and transform his crimes and prisons into virtues, Lizcano chose prison.

Strictly speaking, this is where the true adventure begins. He became an anarchist. He called himself Panclasta. He emigrated to Europe on some transatlantic, possibly as a stowaway. He had calling cards made that indicated his anarchist status in the times where that word sounded out in fearful bourgeois ears like a dynamite blast. Terrorist attentats were in fashion and had become part of the everyday life of great politicians. Anarchism had become Panclasta's official career. This began with his arrival in Barcelona, the first European city where he set his wandering feet; it opened all the jailhouse doors to him. He was deported from Barcelona. From Marseilles. From the Italian ports. And from all the ports of the Mediterranean. When they asked him his name and occupation, he invariably replied: "Panclasta; anarchist." It would have been better, in those simpler times, to have said: leper.

An anarchist Congress was convoked in Amsterdam, brought about by Prince Kropotkin and the most exalted disciples of Marx. Some vagabonds, philosophers, and cynics gathered there, people like Panclasta, who appeared at the congress as the delegate of Colombian anarchists. It's likely there were no great scruples in the examination of credentials because Panclasta was able to have a voice and a vote. In some publication of the moment, the kind that were snuck around in the mail and that the unthinking bourgeoisie thought full of dynamite, some of his words appeared. It seems they were aggressively aimed at the Universal Peace Congress that met at the same time in The Hague, where the official Colombian delegate was Santiago Pérez Triana. The anarchist from Chinácota, Santander, Colombia said:

*You have been sent by the bourgeois governments of the world to lay the foundations of peace, but the only things that will come from your exchanges are innumerable and bloody future wars. We anarchists, representatives of all the oppressed peoples of the earth, come to a revolutionary congress, and demand a fundamental change in social order—we are the ones who lay down the principles of universal peace.*

The Dutch police dissolved the communist congress. Panclasta took to the streets with Kropotkin and the other vagabonds. They shook their red flags and wanted to be the mouthpieces of the proletarians of the entire planet. There was some kind of dynamite attentat. The police intervened and imprisoned the main instigators of the riot. “Pancasta; anarchist” went to jail. The news, extremely sloppy at the time, brought only this laconic news back to our region: “The Colombian delegate in Holland was put in prison.” The president of Colombia, General Reyes, sprang into action and gave all his orders thinking that the one persecuted by the agents of order was the bourgeois Pérez Triana, still ignorant of the existence of the anarchist Panclasta. He undertook a diplomatic protest against such a great violation of international law. General Reyes never excused Panclasta for this situation, which the great man considered to have been ridiculous, and throughout his life he was afforded opportunities to show the perpetual resentment that it produced for him. He could not have cared less if Panclasta rotted in jail. Maybe he even wanted that. Panclasta was an anarchist and he was now part of that raggedy gang of criminals and ruffians who were trying to assassinate His Imperial Majesty Alexander of Russia, to destroy the thrones and governments that symbolized civilization, and to establish the rule of the monstrous theories of the bearded Jew Karl Marx.

Deported from Holland, Panclasta managed to sneak into Paris. Before the police ever did, he was the one to discover Ravachol, the famous character who held the scepter of terrorism in his hand. He had blown up the Ministry of Public Works and produced the anxiety of imminent attentats in Paris and all France. From Ravachol, Panclasta learned the chemical formulas of explosives, the process for manufacturing those ingenious time bombs that go off at a precise moment, and the method of making those other precious artifacts of destruction that use perforating acids. And with that valuable knowledge Panclasta threw himself into Russia and entered those clubs of nihilist students that were planning the assassination of the czar. The snows of St. Petersburg protected their sinister conspiracy, and Panclasta had a place to exercise the apostolate he had chosen for himself. The failed revolution and the tremendous repression that was its consequence led him to Siberia, like all those characters in Tolstoy, Nicolas Garin and Maxim Gorky. The entire implacable rigor of the knut fell on his shoulders. He was condemned for life to merciless exile, with thousands of rebel youth who had been sentenced to die like Dostoyevsky’s hero. He planned an escape with a pale young man, of wide forehead and shaking hands, who was his friend, was beside him in his heroic deeds, supported his apostolate, and—by himself—ended up bringing about the very revolution that Panclasta and the nonconforming students had undertaken. His name was Vladimir Uljanov, but, like Panclasta, he had changed his name and was now known as Nikolai Lenin. Together they took the same dangerous journey as all of the victims of czarism to escape the white hell—the route of the eternal snows of the steppes towards the yellow seas where they could find the hope of freedom. A more knowledgeable biographer will write the story of the mad odyssey of Nikolai Lenin and Biófilo Panclasta through Siberia, China, and later the return by way of the mysterious seas of India or other exotic routes, finally reappearing in Paris in a tiny beggars’ boarding house with one pair of shoes between

them, which they traded off so as to go out with the dual objective of continuing their tireless apostolate and finding daily sustenance. Panclasta reached out to his Colombian compatriots to ask for cents; Lenin to Russian émigrés to ask for kopeks. Later Panclasta dismissed Lenin. Once, with a few cups of liquor in front of him, he explained why:

*What is absurd about Lenin is that he wanted to realize ideals in practice. Man must live from ideals, not deeds. What is left of an ideal when it is reduced to a practical deed? How can you keep fighting for it? The philosophical mistake of communism is rooted in this: as an ideal it is perfect; as a practical deed it is impossible. As long as it is an ideal you must fight for it. When it is a practical deed you must fight against it. Also, to reduce communism, which is the supreme ambition of the proletarians, to a practical deed, strangles freedom, which is the supreme ambition of humanity. That is why I am an anarchist: because above all conditions of human life I place freedom.*

Unbalanced, illogical, like a modern poem, that is how Lizcano's life unfolded. Once in his improbable wanderings, he came to Sorrento, where Alexei Peshkov, called Maxim Gorky, was trying to cure his tuberculosis. He was a guest of the writer. He drank vodka with him. And Panclasta remembers that at this time his will to fight was fading because Gorky lived like a bourgeois in laziness and contemplation. One day he was strolling on the seashore. A shellfish had been imprisoned by a rock, under the weight of which it struggled uselessly. Panclasta, obliging and affectionate, leaned down and set the little being free.

"But you, Panclasta, destroyer of all things, who loves life to this degree, deserve to be called Biófilo." So it was that Lizcano, from Chinácota, completed his paradoxical and contradictory nom de guerre: Biófilo Panclasta, anarchist. He went on from there with that name, traversing the world until he was acquainted with the prisons of three hundred seventy seven European cities in which he was locked away as a natural-born enemy of society. But at some point he felt nostalgia for Colombia, or maybe European governments wanted to send home this load of explosives that Panclasta seemed to be. He showed up in Puerto Colombia; General Reyes was still in charge of the country and had not forgotten the bad joke in Amsterdam. With that serenity he brought to his presidential acts, he demanded that Panclasta not be allowed to disembark. The Colombian protested that he was a citizen, but, as his arguments could not convince the mass of soldiers that were keeping him on board, he dove into the sea to swim to the beaches of the nation that so angrily rejected him. But when his tired feet hit the sand, he found a wall of bayonets. They day he told me this story, he unbuttoned his shirt to show me the scars of twenty wounds left by Colombian bayonets, and he removed his hat to point out, under his thin graying hair, the other scars, from rifle butts. Panclasta ended that story like this:

*Of all the nations of the world, the most hostile has been my own homeland. For if I have been sent to jail everywhere, only here did they try to kill me for requesting hospitality.*

That is how the story goes, this endless cinematic adventure that is the life of Biófilo Panclasta. Around then he went to Venezuela and Juan Vicente Gómez detained him in the fortress of Puerto Cabello for around seven years. He returned to Bogotá and his wanderlust made him remember that he probably had a child in Buenos Aires, given to him by a Russian princess with a complicated name. Around then the intellectuals feasted Biófilo, recognizing his almost heroic, surprisingly romantic, and deliciously nonconformist condition. He wandered south and

five months later arrived at the city on the River Plate, from which he was deported three weeks later. He ended up in Brazil; a few months later, after having been tolerated under surveillance by the authorities, a strike broke out in the coffee-worker populations in the interior of the country. The government hurried to blame it on Panclasta. With five hundred comrades, he was deported to the heart of the Amazonian jungle.

He watched them die from tropical diseases, one by one, beneath the ancient trees, as if wounded by lightning. They moved like walking corpses and the only scene more horrible that he could remember was in the Siberian steppes, when the knut whipped the backs of the prisoners, who died under his torturer's blows. But Biófilo, tireless wanderer, threw himself into a solitary adventure in those jungles, and again, pale, broken, more miserable than ever, he came to Bogotá. Age had whitened his hair and weakened his soul. He began to lose his rebellious drives. Back there, somewhere in his soul, maybe he desired a peaceful stillness, the warmth of a fireplace, the protection of care, the cultivation of a feeling. That was when he found Julia Ruiz, the clairvoyant, in her dump on 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue, carrying out her marvelously humble life.

Life presents the most unexpected complications. The arms of a woman in her sixties finally tamed the anarchist, bringing him warm sensations he had never before felt. The extinguished drive still tried to come out and the rebel would make plans to go wherever there was a strike to make his presence known and show his revolutionary solidarity. But he had a center of gravity now and he experienced the nostalgia of love in old age. That is when he wanted to write his autobiographical books, the titles of which were heroic: *Twenty Years of Anarchic Bohemia; My Prisons, My Exiles, and My Life; My Infinite Exodus*. But his unquiet soul denied him the chance to write them and finally brought him to drink.

Nowadays Biófilo Panclasta drags his miserable oldness around the strangest slums of the city among beggars and vagabonds, nameless.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1939. Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, *el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural "Alas de Xué", 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# Gonzalo Buenahora: Biófilo Panclasta in Barrancabermeja

## Biófilo interviewed by Felipe

(...) One day Felipe, occupied with his daily labor, saw an old man approaching:

“Which way is the road to Pamplona?”

“To Pamplona?”

“Yes, to Pamplona. That is where I am going.”

“Look, it’s over here to the right.”

“Thank you. One more question if you don’t mind. Is there anything to drink around here?”

“Yes, of course. Just a minute. I’ll go back to the ranch.”

The man sat down on a rock while Felipe left and returned with a container of guarapo.<sup>1</sup>

“Thank you, young man, thank you very much.”

“You are going to Pamplona?”

“Yes sir, I am.”

“What for?”

“Ah! I’ll tell you. You don’t know who I am?”

“How would I know?”

“Well, I am... Biófilo Panclasta... Ah! You’ve never heard of Biófilo Panclasta?”

“No sir, I have never had the pleasure.”

“Well, look: I am an anarchist, a world traveler. I come from Europe. I abandoned Colombia years ago. I am already old and tired and that is why I am going to Pamplona, the city in which I was born, in search of a tranquil life.”

“And what were you doing in Europe?”

The old man took a sip of guarapo and answered in a tired voice:

“Revolution.”

“Very interesting. Tell me about that.”

Felipe, tossing his sickle to the ground, curled up before Biófilo, fascinated by the story.

“Well, you will see. In this century we will see the irruption of nihilism.”

“Of what?”

“Nihilism, that is, the loss of faith in the greatest historical values that have up until now guided human evolution,” Biófilo parsimoniously explained.

“Does that mean that everything will change?”

“No, not that everything will change; but that we will change it all. That is revolution.”

“But... Father Lizcano had told me that we must follow in the tradition of our elders.”

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<sup>1</sup> Poor people’s liquor.



"Of course it would be a priest! That is not how it should be. Listen, son: tradition weighs like a mountain on the brains of the younger generations. Understand?"

"Yes, yes, more or less."

"It is the most logical thing in the world. Things can't go on the same way."

"And in Europe, where did you make revolution?"

"Well, young man, I traveled the entire continent. I came to know all the jails, especially the ones in Spain, France, and Italy."

"Holy God! What did you do!"

"Ha! In Spain I almost brought down the monarchy," said the old man with pride.

"How did you do that?"

"I set a bomb."

The old man stopped to drink some guarapo and continued:

"Yes, I set a bomb in the precise place where king Alfonso XIII had to pass, but the bastard escaped, because the damned thing did not explode on time. *Je maintenant me souviens de la France.*"

"What did you say?"

"I remember what happened in Paris. The president of the Republic was to travel to Rome, and I was able to come on board the train without them seeing me, with a little bomb in my pocket, of course. I placed it strategically and I thought that Monsieur le President would go easily, when the device exploded without the train having left. I was blown out of a small window by the force of the explosion, and I found myself in the station, completely naked."

"Oh! That was good, but also very bad!"

"What do you mean, bad?" protested the indignant old man.

"Yes, very bad, because those who commit violent acts against humanity go straight to Hell."

"Come on! Priestly crap. Look, when I lived in Italy, I was an anarcho-syndicalist, and I was a carpenter. One day, the Pope, despite my ideas, called me up and asked me to construct a cross that would appear as old as possible. I made it and left it in the patio of my workshop. Six months under the sun and rain. When I took it to the Holy Father, the cross really seemed to be two thousand years old. We made splinters of it and thus manufactured thousands of relics that the faithful bought at a great price. '*Guadambiano moldo soldi.*'"

"But the Pope is the man who has the most authority in the world! Don't you see that many millions of men obey him, and also..."

"You really believe all that!?" Biófilo interrupted. "The world clearly orbits around the great actors, and invisibly around the creators of tablets of values. It sure is obvious that you haven't read Nietzsche! You have to read him: he is very, very important. Nietzsche is the Over-man; he is superior to Bakunin; he is a great philosopher and a tremendous poet. You must learn German to feel his pagan and Dionysian poetry. You have to read Nietzsche in his own language; you cannot translate him. Nietzsche is the greatest Hellenist in the barbaric West. You must read his work. Above all read *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*."

Felipe sat open-mouthed for a while, listening to the demolishing words of the master, while the cold wind of the north whipped his legs. Biófilo was short of stature, wide of back and he walked slowly and surely. Despite his ruddy complexion, one could notice the fatigue that struggles and journeys had brought to his spirit. His cheeks were covered with a sparse and graying beard that descended to the chin with aspirations of being a goatee. His lively, intelligent, and malicious gaze was full of open kindness and a strange sweetness. His plump and freckled hands

grasped the guarapo container with sureness. His head was covered with a wide-brimmed hat. He wore an old grey suit, which contrasted with the white poncho that he constantly adjusted onto his left shoulder with his right hand. Felipe received Biófilo's stories so well that he asked him to spend a few days at his ranch before taking the road to Pamplona. The old man accepted, because he saw, in Felipe's intelligent eyes, a strong and convinced follower of his teachings. The old man knew that only half of his stories were true; the rest was the fruit of his pathological lying. Each night they took up the dialogue once more:

"Tell me, Felipe, have you lived here long?"

"Ugh! Since I was born. And where have you lived the longest?"

"Well, I was not really born in Pamplona, as I thought I said, but in Silos. I was baptized in Mutiscua. That was in 1879, if I remember correctly. I was never told what year I was born, but it must have been the same year I was baptized."

"Sure, everyone is baptized not long after being born."

"I traveled to Europe when I was 19, in the flower of my youth. The first city I saw was Lisbon, capital of that lovely country called Portugal. Wow, did I like Portugal! In four years I saw Spain, France, and Italy. Oh, that Italy was incomparable! And there I met, in the city of Sorrento, guess who?"

"I can't imagine."

"Alexei Maximovitch Peshkov. In other words, that demigod named Maxim Gorky: what do you think of that?"

Felipe said nothing. The old man's words had him in a daze. The old man continued:

"We were twenty-four years old. Hah, what fun we had! He was finishing his third work — what was it called? Ah, The Lower Depths, that's right, it was called The Lower Depths. Maxim was the one that gave me the name I now use."

"How did that happen?"

"In those times I wandered the roads of Europe, preaching that I was a lover of life, capable of destroying everything and that is when I ran into Maxim. I remember clearly how he baptized me. He drew close and said: 'If you are the lover of life that destroys everything you should be named BIOFILO PANCLASTA which in Greek means exactly that.' From then I have used this pseudonym and the whole world knows me that way."

"Then I went to Rumania and was thrown in jail for participating in a revolution. Obviously I escaped and went to Switzerland, which, as a neutral country, treated me very well, almost like a hero. Later I traveled to Russia and the czar, who knew how dangerous I was, had me imprisoned and exiled to Siberia. I stayed there until I found a way to escape, and I went to Barcelona, where I participated in the famous Tragic Week. That was a lot of fun."

"What is the most important thing you have done in your life?"

"One of the most important things I have done in my life was to attend, as a delegate, the world socialist gathering in the city of Riga. There I met Lenin. A great person that Lenin was! We got along very well together. So much so that he invited me to Moscow once his revolution triumphed. Unfortunately I was not able to do so since in those days I was in Argentina, trying to defeat President Quintana. That time, I was exiled to Montevideo and I had the opportunity to come to Colombia to visit my parents, but — what terrible luck! — they had already died. With a little bit of money they had left me as an inheritance, I returned to Europe and lived in Barcelona for a while."

"But what party do you belong to?"

"Anarchism!"

"And why aren't you conservative or liberal?"

"I am separated from conservatives by their ideas and from liberals by the people. Alright, it's late; time to go to sleep. See you tomorrow, Felipe, have a good night."

The old man and the youth got up and went right to bed. That night Felipe dreamt of Europe. He saw himself in all the anarchist demonstrations that were happening in the old continent. He saw himself imprisoned by the reactionaries beside his great teacher Biófilo Panclasta, the anarchist. The next day, at night, they resumed their dialogue.

"Teacher, tell me how you managed to get out of jail so many times?"

"Well, son, there were many influences. The first thing is that in every country I was in, I belonged to every anarchist movement that there was; for example, I already told you that in Italy I belonged to the anarcho-syndicalist party; in Spain, I was an active member of the FAI; I was also a personal friend of Lenin and Stalin, but what aided me the most was the eternal spirit of Marx, which I would invoke in the moments of greatest danger."

"The spirit of Marx?"

"Yes, Felipe. The spirit does not ever abandon you; for us, it is something like what the Holy Spirit is for that little priest over there."

"I get it. It seems to me that it would be very interesting to travel through Europe, but I think it's impossible."

"Impossible, why?"

"Because I have no money."

"Who told you that you need money to travel? It's very easy..."

"You go to a seaport, Buenaventura or Cartagena; you wait for a good boat and get in it. You wait for them to get out to open sea and then you calmly present yourself to the captain of the ship, saying that you are willing to wash all the dishes in payment for your trip. See how easy? Now, if you want to take some money with you, I can tell you that you'll never earn it here. You've got to go to Barranca, work in La Troco and save. You've got to do that quickly, because you must know Paris. Oh Paris! There is no lovelier city on the earth. Man is born into the crib, but he must get out of it as soon as possible. You won't do anything in this wasteland. Here a clown would die of sadness."

Biófilo was mad with excitement to keep walking but the youth would not let him.

"Wait until Sunday, teacher. Sunday you will definitely go."

Finally the day of the departure came.

"Well, Felipe. You must heed the details of my teachings. Don't forget to read Nietzsche the first chance you get. Nihilism is coming. No one will curb it. All the old values will crash to the ground. No one will believe in anyone or anything. Sons will not believe in their fathers. Fathers will feel frustrated. The youth will begin a movement of rebellion and protest against old customs. They will dress however they like or go around naked as a sign of protest. Vices will be exalted. The old virtues will lose their strength, old people will be ridiculous, young people will disrespect, with an absolute aggressiveness, everything that has been respectable up until this moment. Goodbye, Felipe; follow my advice and you will change the world."

The old man moved away. The youth could not say a single word due to the knot in his throat. There in the distance, the little man who had marked him so profoundly was disappearing into the fog of the wastes.

After the conversations with the old Biófilo Panclasta, Felipe Simanca took the name of Biófilo and went to Barranca...

[the story of “Biófilo” the militant follows...]<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 1970. A fictional story originally published in *Sangre y Petróleo*. Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, *el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural “Alas de Xué”, 1992. English translation by Ritmo-maquia.

# **Iván Darío Alvarez: For Bió-filo: The Gardener of the Desert**

## **For Pan-clasta: The Flutist of a Legend**

“We either invent or we are in error” — Simón Rodríguez

If every man is a mystery, Biófilo's is doubly strange. He is a treasure found in the old trunks of utopia, inherited from our grandparents, who lived in the darkness of other times. His perfume has the heat and vigor of the sun, like in the tropics, and his great feelings, like golden branches.

What we have left of him are some memories forgotten in a library, the dust of the years, the cobwebs of old memories, an old and blurry portrait, and a Russian mane of hair with a Santanderean gaze, found in this incomplete book, like all authentic love of life.

His love belongs to freedom, which is also a legend.

To the solitude of a warrior. To the “ballad of a madman.” To an immortal tango sung by Amelita Baltar.

If someone tries to follow in his path, they will see a spirit leaving footprints with bare feet. He has no time, does not hurry, does not even speak of the country rhythm. He lives, sometimes without choosing, outside of the law and of history. He does not believe in nations; he wanders the world challenging their borders. He denies the masters, the tyrants, and that is how he comes to know all their jails. He returns to his land after a long pilgrimage and he finds no rest. His reputation as a dangerous man extends everywhere. He wears the withered crown of all undesirables.

Even so, with his crazy and sad destiny, he finally marries a pythoness so they can live together, in love with magic and utopia.

The accomplices of dream and love are tender with each other amidst the shadows. Their flames are beacons that light up the storm.

They are oneiric lookouts, black owls. Birds of the night and its omens.

Mission and vision are confused and at dawn they return with their light. They are transparent larks of daytime, and like fairies or sirens, they embody the birth of a new life. They are the color of the rainbow. The fruits of creation, the future seeking the origin, memory, tradition, to tell us of and gaze upon the shine in the mirror of all awakened souls.

His identity is the signal of a virtuous holiness, no doubt, written with another ink, another skin, another blood.

He fed on pearls.

The cold scientists do not understand the paradox: sometimes men are too great for a history so small, above all in a country that has a stupidity complex and divides the land in two colors, all the better to show who the black sheep are.

Just a minute! I am looking through Panclasta's telescope. I see it all on the screen.

There are many cassocks, gray men, hoods, scarves and black rosaries. Bells that smell like a graveyard.

For some time now we have been governed by families with outstanding last names and dolphin smiles. It's hard to be different.

Biófilo accomplished it with his attitude, which is his life and his great word.

In that clerical Colombia, he declares before Olaya Herrera that we Colombians "are pariahs of the law" and after seven years of prison in Venezuela, he makes public his "voice in the desert": hard, sincere, and revelatory. Osorio Lizarazo was the one who later heard him, and stopped us all from completely forgetting about him.

This is why the best homage is to find in other artists the echoes and steps that have not been lost, even in the sea this lyrical adventurer crossed. He was surely called a bandit, like Camilo's Jesus.

Let us now look at his name that is also a philosophy.

He baptized himself for a second time. Biófilo Panclasta: friend of life and destroyer of everything.

"Everything" is what he hates the most and life is what he loves the most.

Everything is man, absolute force, the reason of history, the general of "freedom and order." He imprisons him, ignores him, erases, archives, or beats him. He is the same one who commands us now, dominates and governs us now. He is a fanatic, a dogmatist like death that does not forgive.

On the other hand she, life, is "like all women: capricious and fickle"; but he loved her madly and helplessly.

He lived for her despite everything and its tedium.

He heard life. Diversity, that is, or adversity: two legs that walk together.

Biófilo incarnates life, with his action. Symbol of his creation. He is its protagonist and the proper author of its dramatic script. That is why Biófilo introduces Panclasta. No one introduces me. Only I can be my character. All this leads him to believe in a goddess, "Justice", mother of imagination and will. Like literature, life is inexhaustible. He, Biófilo, is the reality of fiction. An unfinished symphony to take the gag off of silence, a window without steel bars, a grasshopper playing a violin, sometimes (a guitar other times), a buying and selling of souls, a ticket to paradise, a trip to hell, a detective in a mystery novel.

Life is a literary school and its greatest masters are writers. That is why he affirms: "My ethics is aesthetics." And then he lives life as if it were a poem.

This prophet spoke another language. It is not a bitter thing to say that he shared Caligula's madness. He did not praise tyranny, but on the other hand, he took a dim view of the "vile human herd."

Every day they stop Biófilos from being born. In the future we need to see the multiplication of the fathers of a new, better humanity—better than what Biófilo knew. This orphan never had older brothers with whom to drink "water and wine," warm beverages with which to celebrate the virtue of vice, far from being or applauding the "vicious."

He did not know Dadaism, Surrealism, or May '68, but he too wrote, in another style, almost the same thing: "be realists, demand the impossible."

I say goodbye to you, Biófilo, in this last paper minute, in this instant of life, this present that was your future, in which know they will read you and remember other accomplices.

I know that your years will fertilize utopia, and that it will germinate with our joy. “Your past is lovely” and it greatly resembles our present. It is not in vain for us to promise to read, in your secret memory, the pages that have yet to meet the legend.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1986. Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, *el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural “Alas de Xué”, 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# **The Man who Proposed the Assassination of Two Emperors, Three Kings, and Two Archbishops is in his Death Agonies in Barranquilla**

**Biófilo Panclasta tried to take his own life for the second time, after denying God for the Hundredth**

Dying, the famous international agitator Biófilo Panclasta is in our city hospital after having attempted this morning to put an end to his days, for the second time, cutting his own throat with a razor. Two days ago he had tried to electrocute himself with electrical cables after having delivered the following message to an agent of the local police:

*I come from Bogotá en route to Caracas. I got sick and lost everything. I have been a journalist and have traveled through the whole world, but I arrived poor and desperate and all have spurned me to the degree that death is the only recourse left. Only the police have had compassion for my agony. My independence notwithstanding, I think that I ought to free myself from the torments that afflict me. For the last time, and at the edge of the grave, I deny the existence of God.*

This document, which had been transmitted to the press yesterday, was completed this morning before he tried to slit his throat, then adding his last sentence about the existence of God.

Biófilo Panclasta traveled to thirty-two countries and has been held in one hundred thirty jails, including those of Moscow and Petrograd. His triumphant career as an international prisoner began in the Fortress of Caracas, where he was sent by General Cipriano Castro for having written a love letter to an intimate lady friend of the dictator.

Biófilo Panclasta was a close friend of Lenin and lived in Germany with Joseph Stalin and some of the current Russian mandarins. In Paris he lived for a long time with the great novelist Maxim Gorky and he sat with them all in the famous meeting of the Fourth International in Moscow. He also represented incipient Latin American communism in various congresses; in 1923 he was the delegate of the Mexican Anarchist Association in the anarchist congress in Barcelona, where he proposed the formation of an international committee charged with ordering, planning and executing in a single day the assassination of the Czar of Bulgaria, the King of England, the King of Italy, the King of Egypt, the Archbishop of Mexico, the President of France, the Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo and Léon Daudet.



Biófilo Panclasta was born in Pamplona and studied there. He is currently fifty-five years old.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1940. Originally a notice in *El Deber*, Bucaramanga. Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, *el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano*. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural “Alas de Xué”, 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

# Testimonies about Biófilo Panclasta

## **José Francisco Socarras**

I personally knew the only of our compatriots to have participated in the anarchist attentats of Europe and Argentina. He was from the north of Santander (...) He used the pseudonym “Biófilo Panclasta”, the approximate translation of which is “the one who loves life destroys everything.” I met him in the men’s asylum, where I was a practicing physician. In the 20s it was on 5<sup>th</sup> street between 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>; today it’s a women’s asylum. “Biófilo” had participated in attentats in Europe and Argentina and he was a manic-depressive.

## **Alfonso Lugo Salazar**

I met Biófilo Panclasta in 1934 in Bogotá. He was from Santander and had a little anarchist group: the typographer Jorge García, alias “The Louse” and Luis A. Rozo, president of the Syndicate of Newspaper Salesmen. They would give speeches about libertarian communism in the Café Botella de Oro, Café Paris, Café Windsor, in parks and public places. They proclaimed the idea of a classless society, the possibility of the existence of a sole global nation, the end of money, the implementation of barter, the abolition of the state, the organization of the world through Communal Shares, workdays made of four hours of work, four of study, and four of art and sport; they were partisans of free love for the human race.

Panclasta traveled through Europe. He read in the libraries of every country he came to; he met Lenin and Mussolini and argued with them.

The people thought of Biófilo Panclasta as a folkloric character; they listened to him but few among them followed his libertarian ideas.

He lived with a witch, I believe her name was Julia Ruiz, who read cards where 9<sup>th</sup> meets 4<sup>th</sup> Street here in Bogotá; she supported him while he went around preaching with “The Louse” and Luis A. Rozo.

He got kicked out everywhere because he denied the existence of God. They say that he hung himself in Santander, but nobody knows the truth. There are so many legends about him!

## **Marco A. Castaño**

Biófilo Panclasta? Oh, the Colombian anarchist! Yes, I heard of him in 1930. They were fragmentary accounts of his great dissertations. He was characterized as a restless man, agile, with a critical temperament and his own ideas about the world, society, and the individual. He was a questioner of established customs; he spoke about psychology, politics, and philosophy. He was described as an iconoclast and anarchist.

He was a wanderer. It’s said that he was in the Iberian countries and Europe. He was especially interested in Russia. He made contact with people in the Kremlin and with the Moscow intelligentsia, where men such as Lenin and Gorky were to be found.

Biófilo Panclasta was a misunderstood man, considered dangerous by the masters of the establishment. He was persecuted and his ideas were misrepresented. He was a man of myth, critical and dissatisfied with his times. They treated him like a dangerous man, a devastator and a criminal; he lived most of his life in prison — that will show you his worth.

He was classed with the anarchists. Back then that meant banditry and social danger, though of course there were people that knew anarchist doctrine was something different.

The propagators of his ideas here in Bogotá were Servio Tulio Sánchez, an educated shoemaker, and Luis A. Rozo, union leader.

### **Gonzalo Buenahora**

Biófilo did exist. The thing is that back then I didn't have a tape recorder or else I would have written a huge book about him. He was called Lizcano, from Pamplona, over there in the north of Santander, the name that is at the beginning of *Sangre y Petróleo*. He came from the whole world, from setting bombs and whatever else and was already very sick. It's that thing where someone is sick and it makes them want to go home. One day, I had a shop, and a little, short, tanned old man, about fifty years old shows up. "Buenahora?" he asked — "Yes" I said. He said "I am Biófilo Panclasta" and I said, "Of course." He said "I am here to ask you a favor: I want to speak with you but I have no money. Can you pay for some little cheap hotel room so I can stay there and speak with you?" I said: "Of course, find the hotel you want and tell them that Buenahora will pay." The old man picked out a place and every night we would meet at Café Libertad at nine after I closed the shop. That's when I would have got everything he said if I had a recorder. He was a superb liar and made things up, but he was great, really great, a whole novel of a man. We would sit and he would tell me about his life. Later when I wrote *Sangre y Petróleo* I remembered and reconstructed. He left here about a month later and thanked me. He arrived in Chinácota and died there.

### **Rafael Nuñez**

Biófilo Panclasta was a historical figure. Check for yourself what Gonzalo Buenahora says about Biófilo P. because Biófilo P. was in Barrancabermeja very briefly, eight or ten days. He was on his way through, he came here on his way through and that's all.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Translation source: Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero: aventuras y desventuras de un anarquista colombiano. Orlando Villanueva Martínez et. al., eds. Santa fé de Bogotá, D.C., Colombia : Ediciones Proyecto Cultural "Alas de Xué", 1992. English translation by Ritmomaquia.

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