

## The Funny Man Has Seven Hundred Something Hearts

We sit in the bus that will take us across the border  
To the Argentinean side of the Iguazu Falls. My wife and I;  
A dam engineer from Japan traveling alone; two university students from Spain.

The tour guide paces outside. He steps into the bus, sees us five sitting there in three distinct clumps. He shakes his head, steps back to the sidewalk, and paces uneasily. So few of us. Not much of a tip for a day's work. Hardly worth the effort.

"100 percent Brazilian," he jokes about our tour as we are about to pull out of the hotel parking lot. "May or may not work. No warranty whatsoever."

He hasn't shaved for two or three days. He sports a worn chocolate-brown leather jacket. His combed-back wavy hair is just starting to thin. He's got the look of the Kerouac bohemian down pat. *On the Road, Motorcycle Diaries*, all the same thing? Ask Walter Salles, he can tell you. Or at least he can provide you with information on the current entry fee for joining the United States as a full participant of the game in play.

Were our guide to apply for a visa at the U.S. consulate they would turn him down without a second thought. His excellent English, his good looks (even if fading), his university education, his suave if slightly brusque demeanor, combined with an awkwardness that humanizes the potential playboy--it all comes together to make him a risk. This one will overstay his visit for sure. He could run a pizza shop in any U.S. city and make more money than a tour guide in Brazil. He says he wants to buy a spread of land deep in the backcountry, a place for refuge when the crash comes. As he feels it must or this life God has given us must be a joke.

The old ways understood life is a defeat. Victory or accomplishment can never be the measure of a human. Judge a person by the attitude that appears in the moment he faces hope's annihilation.

The modern revolution was thinking victory was our due. Not in heaven but here and now, concluding life strictly to plan. "Mission accomplished."

"100 percent Brazilian," he says when asked about himself. "May or may not be up to the task. No warranty whatsoever." He reveals himself a brother of the heart when he makes this joke. His Spanish is as good as his Portuguese and I ask him whether he is Argentinean or Brazilian. "If I came from the other side," he answers, "I would have

warned you all: 100 percent Argentinean. Abandon all hope who follow me.” And as for me, “100 percent American.” There I stop. I wish I could come up with a clever tag line but I come from a country that rejects the hardness of realities outside the will.

The orders of spirit arranged in overlapping daubs of tone raise  
High their voices not knowing if any intelligence hears them or not.  
When my heart seeks out the path to God, their songs come into  
Unison. A return to structure. A return to form.  
A return to something like purpose but without the compulsion.  
I will be both performer and score. When we discover ourselves  
Practicing in vicinity, unison spills into cacophony. Angels fly overhead  
Attracted to the spreading noise, to the inadequate souls whose wails  
Mimic heaven.

The coati greet us when we get off the bus to take in one of the most magnificent views in the park. They snap at each others’ butts as each animal jockeys to be the recipient of handouts. Ahead of you the two hundred seventy something waterfalls, the splendor that attracts tourists whose bounty supports guides, wait staff, maids, and coati alike.

At lunch in the cafeteria on the Argentinean side of the park, the tour guide adds his voice to the music that a wandering troupe performs for us, we random wanderers of the globe, flotsam and jetsam of money surging in the dizzy moment before the tide begins to recede. Our guide’s feelings upward fly in musical tones that have nothing to do with the cynical laughter of his joking, deprecating words. His voice is that of an angel. His name is Sérgio. He grew up in São Paulo. Yes, he studied music. Instead of settling into a career, as his family expected, he set himself in motion, wandering the globe, one of us. He was in Bangkok when he learned his father had died. He came home. At home, wherever it is, there never is any escape from what your people expect. So many gaps in his story. However he wound up at Iguazu, stability has brought no peace to his heart, no satisfaction to his mother who expected a more illustrious career, but it has gifted him a tangible shape to his will and a set of discontents that say Me!

Life is defeat, a battle already lost. Once humans comprehend that simple truth.  
Sorrow is your helpmeet, she holds your hand, she presses her palm  
Upon your forehead, she massages the back of your neck. All  
Your desire vanishes into ashes. Not even the smoothness of illusion.

Pacing pacing pacing around the front of the bus. What  
Can you say to each other? The script you have as a guide answers  
Questions nobody asks: When did the Jesuits arrive? How many missions  
Did they build? What happened to the Guarani? How many cataracts . . . ?

Repertoires come back as so many ghosts invading your heart.  
Can you not be again the curious young man setting off into the world?  
With a heart full to satisfaction accept the forms before you as  
All you want, not to hold but to behold? The scripts press upon and past you  
Like water in a stream moving over and around a boulder  
Fallen into its bed to sleep with the lullaby of life passing by.