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A Rolling Stone Bows Out*

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Odd, slightly odd, to be known over a continent and a half, not as an academic or a Hispanist or whatever, but as a lecturer. ‘It’s that man again’, and out comes the rostrum.

The six-months’ marathon of 1946—that started a long trail of consequences for Latin-American Studies on this side of the water, and not only in Glasgow¹—had been a red-carpet affair, opening doors on every hand if only because there had not been a visitor of the species from Britain since before the war, and the accumulated fund of goodwill matched the curiosity to meet and to hear. One spoke on English poetry and the war, on the university in the post-war world, on the social function of literature, the Scottish universities, English character and English social history.²

* First published in the *Glasgow University Gazette*, 67 (December 1971), 1–3, this article, in its content, follows logically from where Chapter 5 of Atkinson’s *Fragments of University Reminiscence* breaks off. Like ‘1962–: Brave New World’, ‘A Rolling Stone Bows Out’ recalls Atkinson’s experiences and opinions of Latin America down the decades; but it focuses particularly on his final lecture tour in 1971. ‘A Rolling Stone Bows Out’ serves well, therefore, as a sixth ‘Fragment of Reminiscence’ with which neatly to round off Atkinson’s memoirs, at the point where retirement overtakes him.

1 A reference to Atkinson’s first tour of Latin America in 1946, supported by the British Council. This visit, which he also describes revealingly in ‘1962–72: Brave New World’ (see Atkinson, *Fragments of University Reminiscence*, Chapter 5), had ‘a long trail of consequences’ because it fired his enthusiastic determination not only to promote the study of Latin-American literature, history and thought in his Department, but in due course to turn Latin-American Studies at Glasgow University into an Honours Degree Programme in its own right. Moreover, he was eager to encourage Heads of Departments of Spanish in other UK universities to do the same. Within a year of that first visit to Latin America, Atkinson had published his ‘Programme for a School of Latin-American Studies’ in an *International Hispanic Number* of the *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, XXIV:94 (1947), 139–46.

2 Most of the lectures delivered on that first tour of Latin America, some of whose topics he lists here, have not survived; but several were published (see, e.g., ‘The University and Society’, *The Fortnightly* [January 1949], 1–7; and ‘What Are Universities For? Some Comments’, *The Fortnightly* [March 1952], 170–78). Several others can be consulted in typescript in Glasgow University’s Archives (see, e.g., ‘The Social Function of Literature’ [dated 8 April 1946]). A lecture he gave throughout Latin America in 1946 was: ‘El carácter

These were the set pieces, drawing an audience of hundreds even in small country towns far from universities. Given in a university setting, they were broadcast and printed in country after country. One lecture in one national university—placards in the street, ‘Esta noche Atkinson habla sobre cultura’, special buses out to the campus—led to an honorary professorship, the scroll still treasured.³ The informal occasions were numberless: Rotary luncheons, broadcasts, school assemblies, ladies’ clubs, press interviews, after-dinner discussions lasting far into the night. Not a rest-cure, and those were the days before the four-engined plane and pressurization: infinitely stimulating.

The doors stayed open. Subsequent visits opened more, until to step off the plane in any country of the twenty meant a series of instant contacts: the wine still heady, not least when the reaction was unexpected. Such it proved in one capital, the same of the honorary professorship, where an innocent talk on the interpretation of the conquest stirred up an ecclesiastical hornets’ nest, and the ambassador advised the offender to get out of town fast.⁴

Inevitably, Latin America being Latin America, there was coincidence too with trouble not of one’s making: two revolutions in Argentina (‘Let me know when you are coming again’); civil war in Cuba (an invitation from the Cuban pilot to join him in the cockpit: ‘You’ll have a better view if there’s anything happening down below’); student disturbances innumerable (tanks on the campus, buses burning on the streets). But the stimulus never failed.

Having received so much over so long, and given what one could in return, there was sadness at the thought of fading out without a leave-taking. Congresses have their purposes—the new professionalism of the *congresista* is writ large over the modern academic scene, particularly in the Americas—and here was one, in Lima, just asking to serve another. The date, if it ruled out a further marathon, did permit a more modest and still satisfying farewell visitation of half a dozen countries, Peru, Paraguay,

inglés a través de la historia social inglesa’, a copy of which may be consulted in Glasgow University’s Archives. It was evidently published in the *Revista de América* (September 1946).

3 A reference to the honorary professorship he received from the National University of Colombia in 1946. He also refers to this honour in ‘1962–: Brave New World’, in which he reveals that he found, when visiting Bogotá on a later tour of Latin America (?1968), with the university situation throughout Latin America becoming, in his word ‘explosive’, that his honorary professorship was in abeyance.

4 This unexpected reaction to Atkinson’s talk on Spain’s Conquest of the New World (possibly an earlier version of the paper he published on ‘Conquista, conquistador’, *Folio* (Jan.–March 1961), probably happened in Bogotá on his third tour of Latin America in 1960. On his fourth tour, later in that decade (1966) (as he tells us in ‘1962–: Brave New World’), by request he delivered no lectures there. On that occasion, the upheaval in Bogotá was such that there were ‘tanks on the campus and burning buses in the streets’ (these words in ‘1962–: Brave New World’ are repeated here almost *verbatim*, in the next paragraph).

Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Venezuela, a fair cross-sampling of what Latin America is and what it fain would be. And yes, they would welcome that man again, and his lectures. Seen in that order—vagaries of the academic calendar in their mid-winter—there derived an amount of back-tracking, four crossings of the Andes, a total of twenty-two flights averaging one every other day, and at least a bird's-eye view of virtually the whole of South America.

Lima was given up to the congress, others doing the talking, two from Glasgow among the talkers.⁵ It was a good congress, as congresses go, and as congresses should go, it didn't. Rarely, even in Latin America, has time been treated more cavalierly. By mid-point the programme had collapsed beyond repair and been abandoned. In the ensuing free-for-all politics did not have to rear its ugly head: that head in these countries, whatever the context, is permanently reared. The literature of the emancipation became the emancipation of literature, right heady stuff, straight out of Cuba. *Littérature engagée*: the term ought to be Spanish. Latin-American Spanish. It was a lively congress, and at a final plenary session due tribute was recorded to the excellence of the organisation.⁶

Thereafter the lecturer took over, his first stop La Paz, and much satisfaction that he can disavow, hand on heart, any responsibility for the explosion of two days later, revolution number one hundred and eighty-eight in the country's one hundred and fifty years of independence. At least it runs true to form: he had first passed that way on the day in 1946 when they strung a president from a lamp-post in front of the presidential palace; and the first act of the victor on this latest occasion was again in keeping, the shut-down, 'indefinitely', of the country's universities, last suicidal focus of resistance to the uprising.⁷

Contrast could scarce be stronger between Bolivia and its neighbour Paraguay, the other 'Mediterranean' country of Latin America. Here peace reigneth, unbroken in seventeen years with promise of other five to come under the same strong man, son—like many another president in these

5 It seems likely that of the 'two from Glasgow among the talkers', one was James Higgins, a graduate of Atkinson's Department of Hispanic Studies at Glasgow University (MA Honours French and Hispanic Studies, 1961). In a letter to Ann Mackenzie, dated 28 June 1971 (reproduced below), Atkinson wrote: 'I am off beginning of August on a valedictory lecture tour of Latin America (look to see Mr Higgins in Lima)'. Higgins had opted to specialize in the literature of Peru ('César Vallejo's Vision of Man and Life in His Final Poetic Works', PhD [University of Liverpool, 1968]) and had been appointed, in 1964, to a lectureship in Latin-American Studies in the School of Hispanic Studies, University of Liverpool, headed at the time by Geoffrey Ribbans.

6 Despite being a meticulously organized, highly professional person himself, Atkinson was not without a sense of humour when faced with disorganization created by others, as this account of the conference in Lima reveals.

7 The President of Bolivia who was 'strung from a lamp-post' on 21 July 1946 was Lt. Col. Gualberto Villarroel. The victor on this later occasion (1971) was General Hugo Banzer Suárez.

lands of opportunity—of a European immigrant.⁸ The record, unmatched elsewhere over the continent and a half, points with that of Bolivia to the eternal dilemma. ‘Order’ and ‘progress’ went hand in hand for the positivists, and the motto still figures on the national flag of Brazil. The problem is to combine them in societies obsessed with the pursuit through ‘revolution’ of that will-o’-the-wisp ‘social justice’. To the objective observer these terms and many more—‘democracy’ and ‘university’ among them—still call for mental inverted commas. There be latitudes where words mean what you want them to mean.

In Paraguay the lecturer really got under way. ‘Can the University Survive?’ was deliberately provocative on perhaps the most explosive topic in contemporary Latin America. ‘Give that lecture in Argentina’, said one in authority who heard it, ‘and they’ll lynch you’. Surprising response to another on ‘The Humanities in the Technological Age’, was a standing ovation: the experience, repeated wherever the lecture was given, brought home that one had touched on a deep preoccupation of thinking men everywhere.⁹

Argentina was where it all started, in the so-called ‘University Reform’ of Córdoba, 1918, and the tracing of just what the consequences have been for the universities of Spanish America as a whole is traumatic for those who must still believe in it.¹⁰ Asked if he continued enthusiastic over the *tercio estudiantil*—the one-third student membership of all university governing bodies that was the first great ‘conquest’ of the Reform—, the doyen of Latin-American academic statesmen, five times rector of San Marcos in Lima, oldest and for long greatest of South-American universities, confessed to thinking at times ‘it might have been better if we had made it the student fourth.’¹¹ The lecture *was* given in Argentina, to

8 The President of Paraguay whom Atkinson describes so favourably here was General Alfredo Stroessner (1912–2006), who governed from 1954–1989.

9 Copies of both lectures, which Atkinson mentions here by their English titles, are lodged among Atkinson’s papers in Glasgow University’s Archives. One lecture had possibly first been delivered during his tour of Latin America in 1960, for it was revised and published in 1960 as ‘Las humanidades y la era técnica’ (*Mercurio Peruano* [Lima] [December 1960], 525–49). The other lecture, ‘La Universidad—¿puede sobrevivir?’ (apparently unpublished) was perhaps more recently written; for the date on the typescript in Glasgow University’s Archives is 3 August 1969.

10 Atkinson was sufficiently interested in this sort of topic to write two lectures (both preserved unpublished in Glasgow University’s Archives), titled respectively ‘The “University Reform” of Córdoba (Argentina), 1918’ (dated 19 October 1968), and ‘Fifty Years of “University Reform” in Latin America’ (dated 2 December 1968). We may presume that both lectures were delivered on his previous tour of Latin America in or around 1968.

11 The ‘doyen of Latin-American academic statesmen’ referred to here is Dr Alberto Sánchez, whom Atkinson names in ‘1962–: Brave New World’, and praises for being the ‘patriarch of Latin-American university administrators’. Dr Alberto Sánchez had presented him, in Lima in 1946, with a copy of the Constitution of the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos (of which Sánchez was then the Rector, which was based on the principle that students should make up a third of the total membership of all university governing bodies

the largest and most distinguished audiences of the tour, but in English at the British Institute in Buenos Aires, and no lynching ensued.¹²

Bahia Blanca in the far south, till recently the world's most southerly university, presented a different hazard. The theme, 'Latin America as seen from Great Britain', announced for 9.30 p.m., having been duly disposed of by 11, there came from the audience a 'We understand you have another lecture, on universities: that's what we really wanted to hear'. A cautious improvisation ended peacefully at midnight, then dinner and so to bed at 3 a.m. The plane back north was a last-second snatch as it drew up the steps.

Córdoba, the cradle of the 'Reform', continues to be the most turbulent and revolutionary city in Argentina. The university was in turmoil, its now normal state, and lynching was not unthinkable when a bomb had that day been planted at the home of a professor: powerful enough and clearly intended to kill him and his family, it mercifully did not explode. The U.S. cultural centre, victim of repeated bombings, had seen its splendid library gutted. And everywhere as talking-point, indicative of a nation-wide unease, the journeying to Madrid of repeated delegations seeking to prise out of exile the aged dictator toppled fourteen years ago where no one else, it seems, can save the country from itself.¹³ Time was, and not so long ago, when Argentina vied boldly and optimistically with Brazil for leadership in the Latin-American world. It is a revealing quirk of the red tape in which the country is now swathed that a bookseller cannot send a book abroad, even to a university library, without first defacing the title-page with a 'Sin valor comercial'.

Arrival in Chile coincided with the first anniversary of the presidential election, won on a miniscule majority, that ushered in South America's first Marxist regime: the Bank of London and South America became that day the Banco O'Higgins.¹⁴ There 'revolution', ostensibly as yet within a

(the 'tercio estudiantil') (for more on Alberto Sánchez, see Atkinson's '1962-: Brave New World', note 10).

12 Atkinson is here referring back to his visit to Paraguay (described in the preceding paragraph), where 'one in authority' who attended his lecture on 'Can the University Survive?' had warned him he would be lynched if he gave that lecture in Argentina. It appears that he safely repeated that same lecture, but this time in English, at the British Institute in Buenos Aires. As he tells us in the next paragraph, he did, in the end, deliver at least a version of the same lecture **in Spanish** in Argentina—in Bahía Blanca.

13 The 'aged dictator' Atkinson alludes to here has to be Juan Domingo Perón (1895–1974). He did return to become briefly President of Argentina once more, in 1973. Atkinson comments with distaste on Perón, and on his wife Eva ['Evita'], in '1962-: Brave New World' (see above, and note 6).

14 Chile's 'first Marxist regime' was led by Salvador Allende (1908–1973) who carried out the nationalization of the banks referred to here. O'Higgins, after whom the former Bank of London and South America was named, was General Bernardo O'Higgins (1778–1842), protagonist of Chile's independence in 1818. A military coup in 1973 led to the presidency of General Augusto Pinochet (1915–2006) from 1974.

constitutional framework, is in the saddle, its pursuit of 'social justice' already involving the inevitable threats to the economy and a new and disturbing acrimony in political debate. That was not the country either for dispassionate debate on university survival, but there was still good lecturing to be done and large and appreciative audiences to be had. Away south, in Concepción, a lady of eighty-one claimed vivid recollections of one's first lecture there in 1946 and welcomed the suggestion of a date another twenty-five years on.

One press interview, at the embassy in Santiago, memorable for the clarity with which a lady journalist got the message and passed it to her readers in compelling headlines: 'If you want to know about Latin America, go to Glasgow'. The point was, in fact, well taken throughout. For Uruguayan literature, to Uruguay, for Guatemalan history, to Guatemala. But seek not to learn of Uruguay in Guatemala, or of any country of the twenty in any other.¹⁵

Brazil in particular, vast as the other nineteen put together, with its back to the Andes and a second protective shield in its distinctive language and no less distinctive history and ethnic composition; Brazil looks outward, north to the U.S., north-east to Europe. Just how different its viewpoint one realised in presenting to audiences there the picture of Latin America as seen from Britain, the past and present of Spanish America being clearly to most a closed book.¹⁶ One large university audience, having listened with polite interest, asked to have on the morrow a lecture on Camoens.¹⁷ São Paulo, fastest-growing city in Latin America, is the pace-setter. Every car, lorry and bus on the roads of Brazil, the odd

15 In '1962-: Brave New World', Atkinson recalls the same banner headlines in the newspapers, and makes the same point, namely that while '[i]n any country of the twenty one could obviously study its culture as nowhere else [in Latin America], in none could one study that of any of the others'. In Glasgow, on the other hand, a student in Atkinson's Department could learn a lot about most, if not all of the countries in Latin America, including, naturally, Brazil.

16 It appears, from what he says here, that in Brazil Atkinson delivered, as he had in Argentina (in Bahía Blanca), his lecture on 'Latin America As Seen from Great Britain'. (For the typescript of this lecture, evidently never published, consult Atkinson's Papers in Glasgow University's Archives.) A lecture, titled 'La América Latina en Londres', dated 3 March 1964, also preserved in these Archives, may be a version in Spanish of the same paper.

17 Atkinson had major scholarly interests in Camoens (see, for instance, his prose translation of *The Lusiads*, first published by Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, in 1952). It is possible that the lecture he gave on this occasion in 1971 was based on the lecture 'The Epic Genius of Camoens', first delivered in October 1953 to the Anglo-Portuguese Society, London, and published in the *Anglo-Portuguese Society Bulletin*, 22 (1953), 18-25. Or, the lecture could have been a first version of Atkinson's 'Camoens and the Sons of Lusus', the lecture which he delivered in London on 28 November 1972, by invitation of The Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Council, to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the first publication of Camões' *Os Lusíadas*. This lecture was published by The Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Society, London, in 1973.

ambassadorial chariot apart, is manufactured there, and not a single German component goes into its ubiquitous VW. Some ten thousand students of English on the books of the British Institute—for many years under the direction of a graduate of Glasgow¹⁸—offer another pointer to its drive and awareness. The lecturer had competition in São Paulo, from one Cassius Clay, but there was room for both.

Rio still one of the world's loveliest cities, is capital no longer. Embassies continue reluctant to forego its delights for Brasília, and what does one do with an embassy building nobody wants, built for five million pounds when a pound was still real money? Forego them they must by September 1972, sesquicentennial of Brazilian independence,¹⁹ or forfeit recognition; and there can be no questioning either that Brasília is now putting down roots, or that it is the most exciting experiment of the age in city planning. Not everyone will reckon everything in its architecture a success—cathedral and university ('the worm') struck one observer as notable failures—but conception and execution are alike grandiose, worthy of the new capital of a country, half a continent, that still has its problems on a scale to match but is confident it knows, as so few of the others do, where it is going.²⁰

It was a peculiarly satisfying experience to lecture there, in a British Institute launched close on a decade ago by another Glasgow graduate,²¹ and feel oneself standing indeed on the threshold of an exciting future. The date marked the end of the decade over which the Alliance for Progress was to change the whole face and destiny of Latin America, an enterprise Latin America as a whole has agreed to write off as a gallant failure—and matter there, in plenty, for lectures unlimited.²² It happened also to be first anniversary of the launching of another Brazilian project on the heroic scale, the Transamazonian Highway that when, some three years hence, it is driven the two thousand three hundred miles through primeval forest to link the ports on the Atlantic bulge with the Peruvian border, promises to

18 Not necessarily by the same graduate for many years. Atkinson may mean here that the British Institute, in São Paulo, founded by a Glasgow University graduate, was then headed in turn by different graduates from his Department of Hispanic Studies.

19 Brazil gained its independence from Portugal in 1822. Atkinson did a paper on 'The Independence of Brazil, 1822', for the Central Office of Information in London (a copy, dated 23 April 1972, is preserved in his Papers in Glasgow University's Archives).

20 Atkinson's particular admiration and affection for Brazil is also obvious in '1962–: Brave New World', in which he calls Brazil 'the land of the future'.

21 There is a mention in Atkinson's '1962–: Brave New World' of this same graduate and his launch of a 'British Institute' in Brasília. That graduate may have been Giovanni Pontiero; the dates certainly fit: 1960–1962. Giovanni Pontiero spent these two years in Brazil after he graduated, teaching at a university, founding and directing a British Institute, and doing research for his doctorate on the poetry of Manuel Bandeira (see '1962–: Brave New World', note 8).

22 Atkinson has more to say about President Kennedy's Alliance of Progress of 1961, and details its failures, in '1962–: Brave New World' (see above, and note 12).

revolutionise the country's economy. Stefan Zweig's *Brazil, Land of the Future*, was a gesture of faith in the still unknown. That future is now visibly taking shape: it reinforces Glasgow's long insistence that your Spanish-Americanist is no Latin-Americanist.²³

Venezuela and back, with a bump, to the present. Another prosperous country, intent on a new squeeze of the international oil companies, scarce knowing in the big cities how wealthy it is. Caracas continues to push out new highways, new skyscrapers, new suburbs in all directions with breathtaking speed, the visitor asking himself how much of the city *was* there last time. This visitor being a lecturer, the picture had another facet. The university with its impressive campus in chaos and closed, the Faculty of Humanities and Education in—to quote the press—‘a total state of abandonment’ after the latest bout of wrecking. It was there he should have been lecturing, but what for would he be adding fuel to the flames? The humanities had gone down for the count, university survival seemed doubtfully worth a lynching,²⁴ even a meditative ‘Reminiscences of a Septuagenarian’ was loaded in that atmosphere.²⁵ ‘We have ploughed the sea’, said Bolívar, greatest of Venezuelans, on his death-bed.²⁶ Perhaps the

23 Atkinson insists once more on the success and stability of Brazil as opposed to the other countries—once colonies of Spain—in Latin America. His mention of Stefan Zweig's *Brazil, Land of the Future*, trans. Andrew St James (London: Cassell, 1942) (1st ed., *Brasilien, ein Land der Zukunft* [Stockholm: Bermann-Fischer Verlag, 1941]), is not, therefore, surprising. Ironically, Zweig committed suicide in Brazil in 1942.

24 It appears that Atkinson had intended to deliver his lecture in Caracas on ‘La Universidad—¿puede sobrevivir?’ but was prevented from doing so because he found the ‘[u]niversity with its impressive campus in chaos and closed’, and, as he puts it, ‘university survival seemed doubtfully worth a lynching’.

25 This mention of his memoirs, referred to here as ‘Reminiscences of a Septuagenarian’, provides proof that Atkinson indeed wrote, or was already engaged in writing around the time of his retirement, in 1971–1972, the five chapters about his career 1922–1972, which he finally titled *Fragments of University Reminiscence*. For ‘A Rolling Stone Bows Out’ was published in 1971.

26 Simón Bolívar (1783–1830) was the inspirational Venezuelan general and statesman responsible for the emancipation of much of Spanish America, including Venezuela. In 1825 the Republic of Bolivia was created in honour of Bolívar, praised by many in that country and beyond as ‘El Libertador’. The quote from Bolívar on his death-bed (reflecting his sadness that the colonies he had sought to unite had separated into distinct republics) was previously used by Atkinson in his *A History of Spain and Portugal. The Peninsula and Its Peoples: The Pattern of Their Society and Civilization* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960). In that book, as here, Atkinson regretted the fact that, unlike Portuguese America (Brazil), Spanish America, when it achieved independence from Spain, had ‘disintegrated over many years of bitter and sanguinary conflict into a cluster of new republics, [...] condemned to carry into independence a legacy of disruptive misgovernment and civic irresponsibility that left them a prey for the rest of the century to civil war, tyranny, and dictatorship’ (275–76).

student third should have been a fifth.²⁷ Perhaps ... But the lecturer has ceased from lecturing. He has said his farewell to Latin America.*

27 A final allusion to the 'University Reform' of Córdoba (Argentina) in 1918, and to the principle (adopted by Dr Alberto Sánchez for the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, Lima of which he was Rector) that students should make up one-third of the total membership of the governing bodies of all universities (see above, and notes 10 and 11). In '1962-: A Brave New World', Atkinson recalls meeting up with Alberto Sánchez, still a university rector, at a conference in Toronto, who admitted to him that perhaps it would have been better had the 'student third' ('tercio estudiantil') been changed to 'the student fourth'. At the end of this essay, and of his career as university professor, speaking as someone who had been, in his time, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, and who had observed, in several countries, the student disturbances of 1968, Atkinson wonders whether the student representatives on the governing bodies of universities, rather than making up one-third or one-fourth, should never have been allowed to exceed one-fifth of the total membership.

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