

**Simón Bolívar**  
**“Mi delirio sobre el Chimborazo”**  
**(1822)**

Yo venía envuelto en el manto de Iris,  
desde donde paga su tributo el caudaloso Orinoco  
al Dios de las aguas.  
Había visitado las encantadas fuentes amazónicas,  
y quise subir al atalaya del Universo.  
Busqué las huellas de La Condamine y de Humboldt;  
seguílas audaz, nada me detuvo;  
llegué a la región glacial,  
el éter sofocaba mi aliento.  
Ninguna planta humana había hollado la corona diamantina  
que pusieron las manos de la Eternidad  
sobre las sienas excelsas del dominador de los Andes.  
Yo me dije: este manto de Iris que me ha servido de estandarte,  
ha recorrido en mis manos sobre regiones infernales,  
ha surcado los ríos y los mares,  
ha subido sobre los hombros gigantescos de los Andes;  
la tierra se ha allanado a los pies de Colombia,  
y el tiempo no ha podido detener la marcha de la libertad.  
Belona ha sido humillada por el resplandor de Iris,  
¿y no podré yo trepar sobre los cabellos canosos del gigante de la tierra?  
¡Sí podré! Y arrebatado por la violencia de un espíritu desconocido para mí,  
que me parecía divino, dejé atrás las huellas de Humboldt,  
empañando los cristales eternos que circuyen el Chimborazo.  
Llego como impulsado por el genio que me animaba,  
y desfallezco al tocar con mi cabeza la copa del firmamento:  
tenía a mis pies los umbrales del abismo.

Un delirio febril embarga mi mente;  
me siento como encendido por un fuego extraño y superior.  
Era el Dios de Colombia que me poseía.

De repente se me presenta el Tiempo  
bajo el semblante venerable de un viejo cargado  
con los despojos de las edades:  
ceñudo, inclinado, calvo, rizada la tez, una hoz en la mano...

«Yo soy el padre de los siglos,  
soy el arcano de la fama y del secreto,  
mi madre fue la Eternidad;  
los límites de mi imperio los señala el Infinito;  
no hay sepulcro para mí, porque soy más poderoso que la Muerte;  
miro lo pasado, miro lo futuro, y por mis manos pasa lo presente.

¿Por qué te envaneces, niño o viejo, hombre o héroe?  
¿Crees que es algo tu Universo?  
¿Qué levantaros sobre un átomo de la creación es elevaros?  
¿Pensáis que los instantes que llamáis siglos pueden servir de medida a mis arcanos?  
¿Imagináis que habéis visto la Santa Verdad?  
¿Suponéis locamente que vuestras acciones tienen algún precio a mis ojos?  
Todo es menos que un punto a la presencia del Infinito que es mi hermano.»

Sobrecogido de un terror sagrado,  
«¿cómo, ¡oh Tiempo!—respondí—  
no ha de desvanecerse el mísero mortal que ha subido tan alto?  
He pasado a todos los hombres en fortuna,  
porque me he elevado sobre la cabeza de todos.  
Yo domino la tierra con mis plantas;  
llego al Eterno con mis manos;  
siento las prisiones infernales bullir bajo mis pasos;  
estoy mirando junto a mí rutilantes astros, los soles infinitos;  
mido sin asombro el espacio que encierra la materia,  
y en tu rostro leo la Historia de lo pasado y los pensamientos del Destino.»

«Observa—me dijo—,  
aprende, conserva en tu mente lo que has visto,  
dibuja a los ojos de tus semejantes el cuadro del Universo físico,  
del Universo moral;  
no escondas los secretos que el cielo te ha revelado: di la verdad a los hombres.»

El fantasma desapareció.

Absorto, yerto, por decirlo así,  
quedé exánime largo tiempo,  
tendido sobre aquel inmenso diamante que me servía de lecho.  
En fin, la tremenda voz de Colombia me grita;  
resucito, me incorporo,  
abro con mi propias manos los pesados párpados:  
vuelvo a ser hombre, y escribo mi delirio.

“My Chimborazo<sup>1</sup> Delirium”  
(Translation by WTL© 2016)

Enveloped in the cloak of Iris,<sup>2</sup> I came  
from whence the wide Orinoco<sup>3</sup> pays tribute  
to the God of waters.  
I had visited the enchanted sources of the Amazon,  
and I planned to climb to the lookout point of the Universe.  
I searched for La Condamine’s<sup>4</sup> footsteps and Humboldt’s.<sup>5</sup>  
I followed them fearlessly, nothing stopped me;  
I reached the glacial region  
where the ether hindered by breathing.  
No human foot had been imprinted on the diamantine crown  
placed by the hands of Eternity  
on the lofty temples of the master of the Andes.  
I said to myself: this cloak of Iris’s that has been my banner  
has traversed infernal regions in my hands,  
it has sailed across rivers and seas,  
it has climbed over the Andes’ gigantic shoulders;  
at Colombia’s feet the land of the llanos became level,  
and time has failed to stop the march of liberty.  
Bellona<sup>6</sup> has been humbled by the splendor of Iris’s rainbow;  
so, will I not be able to climb on the gray hair of the Earth’s giant?  
Yes, I will! And swept away by the violence of a spirit unknown to me,  
which seem divine, I left behind the footsteps of Humboldt,  
swaddling the eternal crystals that encircle Chimborazo.  
I arrive as if propelled by the genie that is animating me,  
I falter when my head touches the firmament from root to tip:  
at my feet were the threshold of the abyss.

A feverish delirium blocks my mind;  
I feel myself as with a strange and superior fire.  
It was Colombia’s God that took possession of me.

Suddenly Time appears before me  
looking like a venerable old man carrying  
the scraps of the ages:  
a furrowed brow, hunched over, bald, wrinkled skin, a scythe in his hand...

“I am the father of the ages,  
I am the aged mystery of fame and hidden secrets  
my mother was Eternity;  
the Infinte marks the limits of my empire;  
no tomb awaits me, because I am stronger than Death;  
I see the past, I see the future, and the present passes through my hands.  
Why fill yourself with vanity, child or old one, man or hero?”

Do you believe that your Universe amounts to something.  
that rising above a single atom of creation is really to be elevated?  
Do you imagine that you have seen the Holy Truth?  
Do you stupidly suppose that your actions have value in my eyes?  
Everything is less than a dot in the presence of the Infinite, who is my brother.”

Stricken with a sacred terror,  
I replied: “Oh Time, how is it that a wretched mortal,  
who has risen so high, is not bound to fade away and die?  
I have surpassed all men in good fortune  
because I have risen head and shoulders above all others.  
With the soles of my feet I cover all lands;  
With my hands I reach up to the Eternal One;  
As I walk I feel infernal chambers under my feet;  
Alongside me I am gazing at dazzling stars and infinite suns;  
Calmly I measure the space that encloses matter,  
and, in your face, I detect Destiny’s thoughts and the History of what has passed.”

He said to me: “Examine, learn.  
In your mind preserve what you have seen.  
Before the eyes of your fellow men sketch the canvas of the physical Universe,  
the moral Universe.  
Do not hide the secrets the heavens have revealed to you: tell people the truth.”

The phantasm disappeared.

Transfixed, stunned—you might say—  
for a long time I lay lifeless, supine  
stretched out on that immense diamond that was my bed.  
Finally, the thundering voice of Colombia cries out to me;  
I revive, I sit up;  
with my own hands I open my heavy eyelids:  
I become a man again, and herein I inscribe my delirium.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mount Chimborazo, located 93 miles SSW of Quito, the capital of Ecuador. An extinct volcano in the Andes, it is 20,564 feet high. At the time Bolívar climbed it and wrote this poem, it was thought to be the highest mountain peak in the world. Curiously, since it is the peak located closest to the Equator, it is actually the mountain peak that is farthest from the center of the Earth. Though the mountain’s name is derived from Quechua, its exact etymology has not been firmly established.



---

<sup>2</sup> The reference to Iris comes from Greek mythology. She is the goddess of the rainbow, sea, sky, and underworld. Since she is capable of travelling with the speed of wind, she is one of the messenger goddesses of the Greek pantheon.

<sup>3</sup> One of the world's longest and most famous rivers, the Orinoco covers 1,330 miles in Venezuela and Colombia. The Orinoco and its tributaries has always been and continues to be a major transportation system for Venezuela and the inland llanos of Colombia. The Orinoco has a tremendous variety of flora and fauna; therefore, it is of singular interest to indigenous peoples, explorer-scientists like La Condamine and von Humboldt as well as contemporary medical and natural scientists.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Marie de la Condamine (1701 – 1774) was a significant French Enlightenment polymath accomplished in exploration, cartography, and mathematics. From 1734 to 1744 he explores South America including, especially, Ecuador and the Amazon basin. Presciently, he got a vaccination against smallpox and he was an advocate of this inoculation. As a writer, he contributed the famous French *Encyclopédie*; he was elected to the Académie Française and other national academies. He died in Paris as the result of a hernia operation. Of particular importance for Bolívar's familiarity with La Condamine are two of the latter's publications: *Journal du voyage fait par ordre du roi à l'équateur* (1751 – 1752) and *Relation abrégée d'un voyage fait dans l'intérieur del'Amérique méridionale* (1759).

<sup>5</sup> Alexander von Humboldt (1770 – 1859) was perhaps the most celebrated European and American scientist and explorer of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He was a major German (Prussian) biologist, botanist, explorer, geographer, and philosopher of the Romantic school. His careful and extensive quantitative publications led to the creation of the field of biogeography and, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ecology. He was the first serious scientist to observe and publish findings on the concrete ways in which human activity impacts and degrades the Earth's physical environment. From 1799 to 1804, Humboldt travelled throughout northern South America where he conducted detailed scientific research and description. In his major synthesizing publication titled *Kosmos* in German, he gave the world the universally recognized term of "cosmos." In this work he demonstrated how the universe is an infinitely interacting entity from the smallest particles to the largest planetary systems. Humboldt had met Simón Bolívar first in Paris and Rome. According to Andrea Wulf in her major biography of Humboldt (*The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt's New World*, 2016), Bolívar was directly inspired to dedicate himself to the liberation of South America from the Spanish empire. In 1799, Humboldt climbed a peak near Caracas with Andrés Bello, who was one of Latin America's greatest Romantic writers in addition to being Simón Bolívar's tutor. Furthermore, Humboldt was a strong anti-slavery proponent, which attitude influenced Bolívar to include emancipation as part of this social and political program for an independent South America. In 1800 Humboldt explored 1,725 miles of the Orinoco River and its tributaries. In 1802, Humboldt climbed Chimborazo to the elevation of 19,286 feet, which at the time was the world record climb, although it was a thousand feet below the summit. In 1803 and 1804 he visited Mexico, and in 1804 he went to the United States where he met Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. Humboldt admired democracy in the United States but he said that slavery would be a lasting disaster for the full realization of the potential inherent in liberal democracy. He died in Berlin as a result of a stroke. Two of his mammoth publications are the five volumes of *Kosmos* (1845 1858) and in two volumes, *Vues des Cordillères et monuments des peuples indigènes de l'Amérique* (1810).

<sup>6</sup> Bellona is the classical Roman war goddess, who was symbolized by a military helmet and a sword, spear, and shield; she rode into battle on a chariot drawn by four horses. (Bolívar's famous horse was named Palomo, for its gray coloring like that of a pigeon.)