

The guanaco's gift

*On the occasion of my first trip to the Andes
and to the generous and kind people of Mendoza
on Argentine Independence Day,
Nueve de Julio, 1988.*

The guanaco knows nothing of its dismemberment;
 its sweet eyes closed in the final gift.
Slung over the shoulder of the youngest,
 the severed head proudly brought forth to display the prize.
The carcass worked with knives,
 split open across the table in the crisp, mountain sun.
Wisely will be used, every last morsel-
 fresh meat for weeks, the rest
 dried jerky, the bone for tools,
 the hide for warmth -
 even the rich red velvet
 inside the skin, dripping
 to the flat, warm earth
 rewards the cat.
The family's service,
 the humble dwelling,
 its' outdoor oven warm with pan -
so simple,
so just,
 without the anguish of debate.

The wind is bitter and independent in July.
We return to the warmth of our car,
 now passing across San Martin's Path of Liberation
 and by Las Heras' foundry
 for the burden of his canons.
I am struck by the dedication
 and the price of their task in these
 awesome Andes.
We speed on through history,
 new amigos,
 Mendoza wine,
 camaraderie, laughter
as we struggle to help me unravel the
 morass of the recent politics.

It is not the abstract fact that
the door closes,
because to all, it comes as
inevitable and certain.
Nor is it the boisterous threats
of doors and locks,
nor even the awful portraits,
of the nights of men in Falcons*
disappearing with their prey.

But rather, it is the terror of the present tense,
the active verb itself - as it is always sensed,
even when submerged under the racket of consciousness.

The terror of the awesome duty,
the daily battle we all must wage
for our freedom
for our independence.

The fear that we are failing,
somehow essentially flawed
or unworthy-
as we struggle to recreate the act of will
that places our hands in the light
and the light of our children's hands
held up to the infinity and
the luminous mystery
of the other door.

It is the price of our freedom.
It is the heritage of liberation-
a continual renewal

on this day
the guanaco's gift
an independent wind
the sun
Los Andes.

7/9/88 Mendoza, Argentina, John Sturgeon ©1988

* (The '60s Ford Falcon was the preferred and much feared car used by the
Death Squads for carrying out their atrocities on the *Missing*, during the Junta times, in '70s
Argentina.)