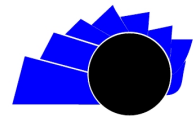




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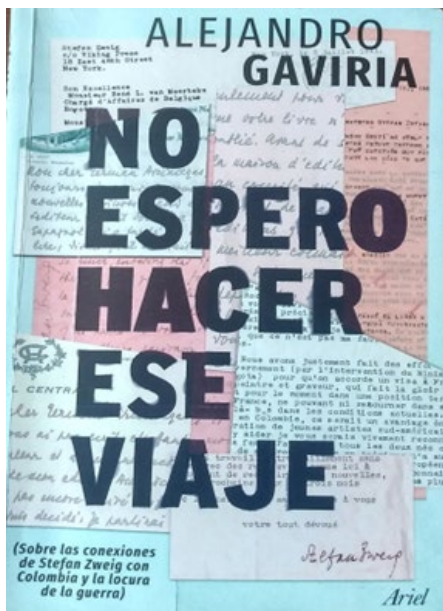


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A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL VISION

Alejandro Gaviria, I don't expect to make that trip (On Stefan Zweig's connections to Colombia and the madness of war). Bogota: Ariel. Editorial Planeta SA 2022, 179 pages.

Rosendo López-González ¹, Astrid Ramírez-Valencia ²



The book is a "literary archaeology" since it unearths, following the traces, a piece of the tragic life of the Austrian Stefan Zweig in his movement through Latin America, and his stay in Brazil. Within the

study, the friendship between Zweig and the Colombian intellectual Germán Arciniegas deserves a special mention.

The book is integrated into three sections. The first, a prologue so well written and so beautifully that it almost renders the thematic content of the book unimportant. The author of the introit is Mario Mendoza. The second, the content in seven chapters, plus the introduction; and, finally, some letters from Zweig where the correspondence between him and Germán Arciniegas stands out.

Zweig and Lotte Altmann, his wife, left Europe for good in June 1940. They boarded a ship in the port of Liverpool. Zweig again arrived in Latin America dazed by the threats of German fascism. His presence in these lands, for the second time, was too short. He did not reach two years. He was there until February 1942. It is obvious that when men withdraw from his environment, a burning melancholy rises in his mind,

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but above all in his heart. Zweig and Lotte, always, like the snail, carried her on her back. The last stage of his life was lived in Petrópolis (Brazil), there they reached the end of their days; Before bidding farewell to this world, Zweig wrote:

"Before leaving my life of my own free will, I wish fulfill my last duty, which is to deeply thank to this magnificent country the reception it lavished on me" (p, 39).

The last person to speak with Zweig was the German journalist and writer Ernst Feder (1881-1964). One and the other Jewish. Their friendship was impregnated by the love of democracy, the game of chess and reading. Feder, from the beginning, sensed that it was the last conversation with Zweig. Stefan began to meticulously prepare his departure, he left no loose ends, he even appointed executor of his properties in Brazil, paid all his outstanding bills and canceled all his obligations. He finished his latest novel and sent it to his publishers. In this part of the book Alejandro Gaviria reaches an extraordinary splendor. It is better to read it than to pay attention to these comments.

But what I want to highlight in this part of the book is Zweig's mention of former Colombian education minister Germán Arciniegas. The writer of the deepest admiration of him that he had met in Argentina, and had invited him to go to Bogotá. By then, Arciniegas was already a refined and consecrated writer, from his sublime pen the titled writing, *From the Greco-Latin Sea to the Caribbean Sea*, had come out, where it is stated:

"Copper-colored squaws looming scared through the shaggy jungle. The Caribbean Venus walks naked, as God threw her into the world. Her jet-black hair falls behind her like brushstrokes of pitch. The children, perched on top of the foliage, blend in with the monkeys and converse with the parrots.

Going back to the last conversation between Zweig and Ernst. Ernst advises Zweig to make the trip to Bogotá, invited by Arciniegas, "You have to go", advises Feder. "No. I don't expect to make that trip." Answer Zweig. Gaviria boldly narrates this part on page 38, without pointing out that this is where the title of the book comes from.

The empathy between Arciniegas and Zweig was born by chance. Or rather the anguish of the exiled to know the language of the receiving country. On one of his voyages, by boat from New York to Rio de Janeiro, someone lent him a book by Arciniegas, *Los comuneros*. Later, in different conferences, Zweig spoke wonders of Arciniegas's book. Later, Arciniegas looked for him in Buenos Aires and they became friends. Alejandro Gaviria affirms that "The American humanist was then able to converse with the European humanist" (p. 67).

Continuing with the fundamental theme of the book, it must be said that when Zweig arrived on Latin American soil, he was already an established writer, well known throughout Europe, an excellent storyteller, a peerless biographer, *The Stellar Moments of Humanity* stand out as a book where he reaches his majesty as a biographer. I recommend reading *The Man Who Lives in the House of a Cobbler*. It is as if we were observing live and direct the moments of Lenin's exile in Switzerland. The calendar marked April 1917.

Alejandro Gaviria with the publication of the book, *I don't expect to make that trip* (about Stefan Zweig's connections with Colombia and the madness of war), reaffirms the need to rescue the ideas of democratic liberalism. Ideas that allow to locate a little the thought and the political practice of the current government. The work easily couples with his last three books: *In Defense of Humanism*. *Reflections for*

Difficult Times, Another End of the World Is Possible (How Aldous Huxley Can Save Us) and Someone has to take the opposite view. I recommend the book. It is very well written, and it also introduces the reader to

other worlds, such as that of Arciniegas and Zweig, in relation to a stellar moment in the cultural, literary, and political life of Colombia.