

Reading Neruda
Melanie Swetz

Canto I: Machu Picchu

Que Bueno! Once again your “likes”
Fill the spaces between my senses
To take me back to Machu Picchu’s
Verdant stonework so high up
In the thinnest air of Peru’s soul
Further rarified by your words like
Embraces pulling me closer to you.

There on the terraced steps llamas
Wonder at lovers curled like commas
Around themselves as their cheeks
Rest on grassy tufts, as they seek -
In tandem - each other’s bodies sleek
With the night wetness of orgasmic
Lusty breathing in the thin air so cosmic.

“My most full love” Neruda’s words
Fall to encircle the woman who like
A sword runs through his veins towards
His heart as the thinnest air holds her
Scent long after she leaves his bed, her
White belly was on his white sheets
Long ago now, alone and up high in Peru.

Canto II: Fugitive Time

A Todos! For all, Neruda, you speak aloud
Of time’s furtive, soulless march forward
How there’s no forgetting about its proud

Face as it appears in everyone’s mirror
To mock us senseless with complete terror
At its endless passing on, but backward
Never – a more vain hope cannot be found.

But, in the fugitive’s defense , a voice speaks
Out loud to offer an alternative to its vast
Uncaring, how time is like us, an actor cast
In a cosmic theatre piece its entrances sleek
And sultry, an Eve with an apple at her breast,
Its exits sneaky and bleak, a snake at the feast
Of mankind’s failure to embrace the beast.

There is no explanation of why or how
Possible, everything has a voice of its own
Everything has a glimmer of a shadow
Everything leaves a footprint on the sea’s
Floor, the flower’s dependence on the bee
Is like time’s magnet for all of us as we
Stagger from innocence into lustful cocoons.

Canto III: Fruit Politics

Entre Las Moscas! The fruit flies enter after
Being called by the conglomeration's laughter
At the ridiculous hegemony of their power
As seen by the workers hoping for treasures
From the cola nut bosses, the juicy cheaters
Of lives left over, re-conquered under brand
Names that spell slavery in their homeland.

Free will paid for by bloody fists and hands
Chopping the banana stalks into pulpy wet
Mash with machetes steely and unfettered
Rapid strokes like a cockroach's scuttle, can
This cosmic joke ever be silenced from land
So sweetly innocent of its rape, can justice
Ever be served in coffee cups just like lust is?

The fruit flies linger on the rotting flesh
Of dead bananas stripped open –a mesh
Of yellow and green skins torn and left
To decay like the wet souls of those kept
By poverty, the working dead without
Names, without the words of confession
For sins committed in the absence of doubt.

Envoi: Humanity's Bread

Nosotros, los poetas! We the poets knead
Words into a salty dough in order to plead
Our case for humanity's ears to be open
To the sounds of itself, the aboriginal ocean
Within, silently pulsing through veins heavy
With memories forgotten among the wavy

Currents of explanations, which like kisses

Wet, leave the cheek coldly alone to miss
The warmth of another's arms in that sea
Where drifting souls alike are like lilacs white
On branches bent double with desire heavy
For something more than longing, to be freed
From the weights and measures of our daily

Bread, to rise up like warm currents of airy

Breathing, to be flooded over by humanity's
Ocean of sounds which will arise from the poet's
Throat like a bouquet of bundled forget-me-nots
A gift of simple words presented metaphysically
For all to share in simple reverence and thankful
Prayer for partaking in those common ingredients

Which form the cosmic wholeness of us all.



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