

Pilgrim in México

William Little

For Shifra Armon

Walking along the *Paseo de la Reforma*,
a lonely soul with Chaplin's gate and grace,
trips in ruts and pot holes,
snaps more of his banal photos,
and looks through the clean glass in Christmas windows.
He enters four or five boutiques,
he traverses elegant aisles in Sanborns with diffidence,
he touches the displays,
and he is repulsed by so many gifts, so much glitter, so many priced packages,
so many French perfumes, so much Swiss chocolate.
"Merry Christmas," he says upon returning
to the streets full of products and people,
full of beggars and sellers and simple passers-by.
This lonely soul feels
the heat, the sweat, the strange courtesy
present on so many brown faces,
twenty-three million brown faces
of beggars squatting in every doorway,
children playing accordions,
youths swallowing lapping tongues of petroleum fire in the intersections,
women selling colorful balloons and cottony dolls in *Alameda Park*,
blind people singing folksongs on subway cars,

children selling gum and their mothers' misery in church doors,
men dressed in Aztec warrior costumes dancing in the *Zócalo*;
and crawling everywhere this human ant-like swarm
that pullulates into subway tunnels,
that climbs up from underground stairways in the *plazas*,
that slithers along myriad sidewalks,
that plays matador with the horned and gutted cars on the streets,
and that resignedly chokes trying to breathe the city's pestilential gases.

Oh, lonely soul! How far you are
from Saint Theresa's convent in Avila!
You are now in the century of Theresa of Calcutta,
of the Therasas from Chernobyl, the Persian Gulf, Port-au-Prince, and Medellín.
You are in the century of the terrorism that haunts
our air, our streets, our houses, our stores, our bones, and our skulls.
Where are Theresa's far-away mystical ways
of tears, quietude, union, and ecstasy?
The four ways in this century now are called
Insurgentes, Reforma, Juárez, and Guerrero.^{*}
Or they could be called Tlatelolco, Xochimilco, Tlalpan, and Anahuacalli.^{**}

Oh lonely soul, suffering soul, my soul!

* Behind the Spanish street names in México City are these ideas: rebels, reform, President Juárez, who brought democracy to México, and warrior.

** These four Aztec place names refer, respectively, to (1) the former Aztec market square which was the site of the final defeat of the Aztecs in 1521 and which in 1968 is where the Mexican army massacred 400 student protesting for civil liberty, (2) the floating gardens south of the capital, (3) a road and town to the west of the capital which was one of Hernán Cortés's allies against the Aztecs, and (4) the site of Diego Rivera's now-deserted house/museum.

You have breakfasted in Xochicalco,^{***}
you have lunched in Cortés's hacienda,
you have dined in VIPS,
but you have not taken communion with the masses in México.

Lonely soul, even though a monastery awaits you
on California's Enchanted Coast,
beware, for you are leaving behind the ant hill
of the new ecstasy,
of the only ecstasy still possible at the end of this complicated century:
it is the ecstasy only the downtrodden and the simple
can find in the solitude of Mexico's masses.

Sevilla, 2004

^{***} Mayan ruins centered around a magnificent pyramid that commemorates a calendrical correction.