

A Traves de los Siglos¹*la lucha de clases*

What choice of flames will melt
these stones of future, oh Mexico?
Between lava-quakes we wish

for peace, dove's feathers above
the purging flood. But bullets ripen
like impatient flax in our fields

to bleats of *das Kapital*. Whose
struggle? Not Morgan or Mellon's;
the nipples we bare to gloved fingers

hardly distract their balance sheets.
Such codas quench our thirst for a
native seed. *Huelga!* The spikes pierce

our wrists until we forget whose
vision it was scratching at our eyes.
While they pin us to branches

Like rugs beaten breathless
priests murmur to our softened bones:
"only Rome swaddles the flesh"

la leyenda de Quetzalcóatl²

In that cycle, were you new fire
or plumed serpent? I grow tired
of this dust. Eyes on Venus

Moctezuma was transfixed by Cortes
and brought him on bended knee
a white headdress and scepter

for blood. No lash could cut him,
no Spanish perfidy enslave his pride.
What are gold flakes to a god? Every

twenty days, another sacred war. When
will your ashes speak again? Now even
we must wear the black cape of bones.

la conquista

Cuauhtemoc², where has your eagle
lord gone? You died three times —
Warrior, last emperor then prisoner

and your sling spared you no pain
from the spur's jab. Cortes,
shackling you, knew how to let

divinity dribble away like a secret
wound. Was it this that finally wove
your hemp and begged for knots?

la epocha colonial

Under the whip, we fracture stones
of Aztec spirituality to pathetic dust.
Our fathers bore these same

boulders up from the river pools
on their blistery backs. For idols
to the Sun. Was it a kinder slavery,

then? But these new gods tarnish
their mettle too soon. When Malinche
is seeded with child by Cortes,

who is finally lashed? You assume
the skin of whom you rape. And drown
in the ashes of what you destroy.

la independencia de Mexico

“Union, religion, independence”:
a flag of green, white and red,
a *mestizo* rebel crowned emperor.

What freedom under a king
though he be yours? Remember
Santa Ana who sold your shoulders

la invasion americana

“In my dream, padre, the eagle
perches on a cactus, devouring
a serpent. What can it mean?”

Now the sun’s behind them, flashing
like lightning on their bayonets
as they muster toward our shattered

wall. “Come down from Chapultepec,”⁴
they shout, “let our limbs be yours!”
Then the bullets begin — what do *we* die for?

tierra libertad

It lingers, like the sweetness of mother’s
milk; old men still hum *la Marseillaise*.
Land dries too quickly here after rain.

David P. Reiter

Notes:

1. “Mexico, Through the Centuries”, a massive fresco by Diego Rivera on the walls of the National Palace, damaged by the 1985 earthquake.
2. Symbolized by a plumed serpent, this god was mistakenly associated with the arrival of the Spaniards, imparting a sense of divinity to Cortes. A new “cycle” was granted by the gods to the Aztecs every 52 years; wars to obtain human sacrifices supposedly took place every “20 days”.
3. The last Aztec emperor, tortured and finally hung.
4. The Cadets who defended this castle against the invading Americans are remembered as the “Boy Heroes”.