

A. ROBERT LEE

AMERICAS

SELECTED VERSE AND VIGNETTE



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Americas: Selected Verse and Vignette

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1ª edición de 2015

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ISBN: 978-84-9134-167-3

Imagen de la cubierta: Sophia de Vera Hölitz

Diseño de la cubierta: Celso Hernández de la Figuera

Publicacions de la Universitat de València

<http://puv.uv.es>

publicacions@uv.es

For My Fellow Ticket-Holders

Anne Waldman

Rex Burns

Kim Blaeser

John G. Cawelti

Andrew Hook

Preface

A career as a university Americanist in my native UK, in the US, in Europe, and in Japan, and with a specialization in literature, has long meant academic writing: books, articles, reviews, the journals. Not the least of which is an earlier volume in Biblioteca Javier Coy d'Estudis Nord-Americans, *United States: Re-Viewing American Multicultural Literature* (2009). But it has also meant venturing into creative tracks. In this case, precisely, verse and vignette. Not only have I had the opportunity of much American travel, to include Canada and Mexico, but also the privilege of frequent writer encounters and friendships. These, for which I will always be grateful, have been an inspiration.

All of the collections (and journals) from which this poetry and prose is taken met with the good fortune to find publishers. I owe a debt of acknowledgement to each, especially Printed Matter Press, 2 Leaf Press, Renaissance Books, *Konch Magazine* and *Phati'tude*.

Each different composition, I hope, above all gives recognition to America, the Americas, as personally lived time and space. Site, journey, people, art, film, music, culture, society. They are meant as forms of close encounter. Serious and in some cases antic. Less myself than persona.

This is also the place to thank Carme Manuel as editor of the Javier Coy series. She was good enough to accept *Americas: Verse and Vignette* as a different kind of

American Studies. I owe her greatly. So do the writings at hand.

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ARS GEOGRAPHICA: MAPS AND COMPASSES

Going Galápagos

i

Three
Quito
sea-lions
stretched
like
Ecuadorean
pashas
along
the
dockside bench.

Equator
gate-keepers
of
Pacific
ease
and
loll.

Whiskered
docents
of
fin, beak, claw and shell
carapace and wing
sea and island
Beagle and *Acushnet*
sight and word
and
all of them
yawning.

Quito
via
runway Guayaquil.

Quito
of
La Plaza Grande
La Catedral
El Mercado de Otavalo

Quito
of
Hidalgo Gothic
be-hatted *mestizaje*
a hundred shoeshine boys

Quito
of
thin oxygen
and
Andean volcano hills

Quito
of
Earth's closeness
to the sun

Quito
of
street *pobreza*
and
JW Marriott Five-Star Hotel
Avenida Orellana y Avenida Amazonas

Quito to *La Mitad del Mundo*
actually
250 meters
off centre

Pyramid
of
latitude and longitude

GPS-confirmed *Museo Inti-Nan*
actually
the centre
of
earth's
curvature
earth's
hemispheres
earth's
lobes
Near, though

iii
Thank you
Incas
everywhere

Thank you
Ecuador's
mestizos
criollos
quechuas
Chirrera, Jama Coaque, Tolita, Machalilla, Valdivia

Thank you

Lago Titicaca
Manco Capac
Machu Picchu
memory *quipus*

Merci
Charles Marie de Condamine
rubber, quinine, metrics, circumference

Gracias
Juan Montalvo's *Las Cantilinas*
thoughts, views, language

Gracias
Jorge Icaza Coronel's *Huasipungo*
novel, history, memory

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Quito zodiac
to cruise ship
isle for isle
turtle-journey
to

Las Galápagos
Islas de Colón
Archipiélago de Colón
Islas de las Galápagos

vertical arrow diving frigates
at home blue-footed boobies
herons on one foot watching
at home huge gulping pelicans
swallow tailed gulls on sentinel duty
Darwin's finches

(one upon my shoe)
neck coupled albatrosses
un-flighted cormorants among the crabs
sedate breaststroke lagoon turtles
night time spectral prowler sharks
rock-hopping diver penguins
clambering, clod
heroic monument tortoises
iguanas land and marine
in their thermometer bodies
of mottle-leather skin
and
un-dinner table sneezing salt
and amid these origins of species,
across ranger white-marked trails
across silver forests
across black roped lava
across 500-species of shrub and plant
across volcano pools
ascend
rock formations
serrated cliff-faces
weather and wind chiseled ledges
whorls, folds, wrinkles
high cathedral vaults of Nature
playfields of pottered cinder
stilled spurts of fire-stream
messed pebble, boulder, stone
live thesaurus petrification

vocabularies of Spain fade –
San Cristóbal, Santa Cruz, Baltran, Isabela
and other *Encantadas*

vocabularies of England fade –
buccaneer Ambrose Cowley
Darwin Research Station
Lonesome George

vocabularies of Melville and Vonnegut fade
page and paragraph

vocabularies of cruise and tour fade
guide and guidebook

is not this, first, finally, un-faded
earth's evolutionary design
earth's sea-risen island
epic
of
magma, basalt, crust, littoral?

is not this, first, finally, un-faded
earth's delivery room?