

In the Basilica de la Soledad in Oaxaca

Trebor Healey

I think her look was one of disdain
 I'll never be sure
 She was walking on her knees
 and I was sitting in a pew
 fingering my 3-peso Virgin de la Soledad medal
 hoping for miracles
 as I looked about me at the bloodied saints and
 gold-leafed Spanish baroque columns.
 I'd always idealized Indians before I saw her
 I almost concluded:
 "Old catholic ladies of that sort are the same everywhere; they just don't approve."
 But what's the use of that judgment?
 What do I learn making it?
 I've only confirmed something, not learned anything new
 That didn't work when I was 14 holding the white candle of Confirmation
 Why should it work for my trip to Oaxaca a whole lifetime later?

She was beautiful and simple
 and I don't know her mind
 I only remember
 the dignity of her long, gray hair
 the frayed, green and white checkered housedress
 barefoot, but feet as good and tough as any shoe
 She'd have a million reasons to despise me
 A white man with enough money to travel
 expecting to be welcomed everywhere
 I thought then of going back in to join her on my knees
 but feared that might offend her more
 -as if to presume
 Besides, I was too proud and self-conscious to crawl on my knees after her



So I went out and looked for boys in the parks
who would be willing to accept me,
to make me feel welcome in the world
in Oaxaca
in their world
They could make me feel Mexican for a brief spell
Then maybe I could go back and find the old woman
and in my best Spanish
tell her:
"I just made love with a young Mexican boy and he was beautiful."
In my madness
believing somehow she might understand
my odd way
of imploring: "I love you. Will you love me?"

