



August 17, 2016

“Love Poem to Los Angeles” by Luis J. Rodriguez

Luis J. Rodriguez

LOVE POEM TO LOS ANGELES

*with a respectful nod to Jack
Hirschman*

1.

To say I love Los Angeles is to say
I love its shadows and nightlights,
its meandering streets,

the stretch of sunset-colored beaches.
It's to say I love the squawking wild
parrots,
the palm trees that fail to topple in robust
winds,
that within a half hour of L.A.'s center
you can cavort in snow, deserts, mountains,
beaches.

This is a multi-layered city,
unceremoniously built on hills,
valleys, ravines.

Flying into Burbank airport in the day,
you observe gradations of trees and earth.
A "city" seems to be an afterthought,
skyscrapers popping up from the greenery,
guarded by the mighty San Gabriels.

2.

Layers of history reach deep,
run red, scarring the soul of the city,
a land where Chinese were lynched,
Mexican resistance fighters hounded,
workers and immigrants exploited,
Japanese removed to concentration camps,
blacks forced from farmlands in the South,
then segregated, diminished.

Here also are blessed native lands,
where first peoples like the Tataviam and
Tongva
bonded with nature's gifts;

people of peace, deep stature, loving hands.
Yet for all my love
I also abhor the “poison” time,
starting with Spanish settlers, the Missions,
where 80 percent of natives
who lived and worked in them died,
to the ruthless murder of Indians
during and after the Gold Rush,
the worst slaughter of tribes in the country.

From all manner of uprisings,
a city of acceptance began to emerge.
This is “riot city” after all—
more civil disturbances in Los Angeles
in the past hundred years
than any other city.

3.

To truly love L.A. you have to see it
with different eyes,
askew perhaps,
beyond the fantasy-induced Hollywood
spectacles.

“El Lay” is also known
for the most violent street gangs,
the largest Skid Row,
the greatest number of poor.

Yet I loved L.A.
even during heroin-induced nods
or running down rain-soaked alleys or
getting shot at.

Even when I slept in abandoned cars,

alongside the “concrete” river,
and during all-night movie showings
in downtown Art Deco theaters.
The city beckoned as I tried to escape
the prison-like grip of its shallowness,
sun-soaked image, suburban quiet,
all disarming,
hiding the murderous heart
that can beat at its center.
L.A. is also lovers’ embraces,
the most magnificent lies,
the largest commercial ports,
graveyard shifts,
poetry readings,
murals,
lowriding culture,
skateboarding,
a sound that hybridized
black, Mexican, as well as Asian
and white migrant cultures.

You wouldn’t have musicians like
Ritchie Valens, The Doors, War,
Los Lobos, Charles Wright &
the Watts 103rd Street Rhythm Band,
Hiroshima, Motley Crue, NWA, or Quetzal
without Los Angeles.

Or John Fante, Chester Himes, Charles
Bukowski,
Marisela Norte, and Wanda Coleman as its
jester poets.

4.

I love L.A., I can't forget its smells,
I love to make love in L.A.,
it's a great city, a city without a handle,
the world's most mixed metropolis,
of intolerance and divisions,
how I love it, how I hate it,
Zootsuit "riots,"
can't stay away,
city of hungers, city of angers,
Ruben Salazar, Rodney King,
I'd like to kick its face in,
bone city, dried blood on walls,
wildfires, taunting dove wails,
car fumes and oil derricks,
water thievery,
with every industry possible
and still a "one-industry town,"
lined by those majestic palm trees
and like its people
with solid roots, supple trunks,
resilient.

—*from Rattle #52, Summer 2016*

Tribute to Angelenos

Luis J. Rodriguez: "As the city's second Poet Laureate, chosen by Mayor Eric Garcetti in the fall of 2014, I've read poetry, lectured, and/or facilitated workshops in more than 100 venues in the Los Angeles area, to around

13,500 people, including libraries, schools, book fests, community festivals, graduations, and more. This City of Angels is indeed a city of poets. And these poets do more than just sing the city fantastic. Many draw attention to the social gaps, the poverty, the police killings, the deteriorating schools, mass incarceration, climate change, homelessness. They are bards of beauty and bounty, even when these are lacking. And they often point out viable ways out. Poetry is the essential soul talk we rarely find in this society, where most words are to inform, instruct, or to sell you something.”
([website](#))

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