

Meditations of the Platonist *In the Third World*

~for Andrew Porter

The good dialectician, says P, is like the skilled
cook who carves up an animal without breaking
a bone,
and the heart while cleaved of its hearth is still
intact. Or, the butcher who cleans

but never kills—
his knife

tracing the lineation
the musculature marked out by n[ur]ture

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[Thanksgiving]

“You cannot learn this in books,” he wrote.
He’d spun the chicken into a stupor, the village
boys teasing him, Gringo, Gringo! when José
put the machete into his hands. By this time
he’d been there long enough to refuse, but
didn’t! The girls gnawed at sugarcane and
squirmed with delight.

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Knowledge, says N, resides in the certainty of
something directly apprehended

irrational
beauty of...
mindless
suffering of...

Do souls perish along with bodies
if souls perish first? N begged.

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[Christmas Eve]

The Dump? “Seeing it,” he wrote, “is seeing evil
brought to you courtesy of United Fruit Co, but
also one’s own complicity therewith.” The trash
trucked in from the city by night, heaped high
against the stucco sky and slivered moon. The
cattle gone gaunt, sunk-ribbed, the vultures
preening about, and the children shoeless
scavenging for glass to sell back. But somehow,
in all this wreck & heartbreak, “a newborn baby
calf with its placenta still attached.”

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For N, life is senseless; living, a descent into
Hobbesian absurdity.

Silenus, after all, who persuaded
Midas that nothing, nowhere, nobody
is preferable to some
et cetera.

But as art, & only thereby,
is existence, the world, eternally justified.

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[Easter]
“No rain for forty days makes for eight-inch
sunflowers!” How stupid to think one could
teach them—teach them!—modern methods of
agriculture. When the farmers finally complied,
it was the land that refused the new seeds,
spitting up a head of corn and a handful of
beans, nothing more. To make matters worse,
yesterday word came that someone else back
home has died, this time by his own hand. More
than ever the thought offends me, in this land
with all its poverty and exploitation and
violence, where the name Romero is a talisman
too heavy to carry forward.

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All considerations of *good, right* are beyond
rational justification, not accessible through
austere rules of logic. Instead,

the leap
towards the Source
(centripetal or -fugal?)
no ballast
no landing gear
stupid hope. And despite moreover
what P says of immanence, or the Ideal, there is
great comfort
in the shadow
one casts.

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[August 29th]
“No regrets,” he wrote. “But the truth, as you
say, is never the truth you counted on.”

His host family had baked a small
custard cake and presented it to him with a few
candles.

“But I am only beginning to learn that home is
something that travels everywhere with us, a
latent satisfaction in words like *bourbon*, or

hamburger, names like Merton, or *Evanthia*, and yes, *you*.”

He finished the bottle of *Rum Zacapa* with Hugo and Fernando, then ate the last twist of *chipa*. It was a cool night in *estación de lluvias*, & he slept.

“In this life there are many thresholds, and recognizing this, we step closer to the kind of knowledge (often *via negativa*, of who we are not) that can only be had at a great distance. Connections are strained, sure, but spring back with an even greater force.”

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Reading P’s *Phaedrus* and N’s *Beyond Good & Evil* in tandem: with one hand, the building blocks of Western Civ;

with the other, the sledgehammer drops.

But finding in M’s *New Seeds* a kind of spiritual wonder, or awed acceptance, a sense of tragedy as the sublime negatively defined:

everywhere an invisible
transcendent
& infinitely abundant
Source.

“p.s. no such thing as ‘catharsis’ in the kaptial *Guate*.”

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[*Valentine’s Day*]

“Starting out I believed that a person with the right ideas could change things there. We cast our nets broadly back then. Like you, I’m still finding my voice (which might mean first losing it). But if we fail, friend, our beliefs are never in vain. For now why not say we tried, and caught nothing but the net...

“The Sufis say we are mirrors, and our job is to make ourselves as clean as possible so that God may see purely his own reflection. But I am somewhere else, brother, stuck between places. Struggling to make sense of/in another’s language. So, God as such is a mirror that opens up on both sides of me, my past, my future, both, all at once.

Peace, Andrew.”