



Oaxaca Times

®

VOLUME XVIII No 194 THE INNER LIFE OF OAXACA • FEBRUARY 2005 www.oaxacatimes.com

Romance in the City



Feature

News

Film

Travel



Dining Out?
We have suggestions
Page 7



Say NO to the
Libramiento Norte
Page 12



Page 13



Where do we go
from here?

Page 14

ENTERTAINMENT * CULTURE * DINING * FINE ARTS * AND MORE

LEARN SPANISH AT THE ICC: OAXACA'S BEST LANGUAGE SCHOOL

The Labyrinth of Romantic Love

by Sam Lowry

Better to have loved and lost than not to have loved at all, they say. But they also say that a taste of honey is worse than none at all, so what do *they* know?

When I was a child, Valentine's Day was generally a source of sadness and embarrassment to me. I never got any Valentine's cards, having failed to inspire the devotion of any secret admirers. I expect that many of you will be able to relate to this.

It's ironic that, of all the saints, Valentine (despite being unrecognized by the Catholic Church) is perhaps the best known (after St Nick, of course). The cult of romantic love is the supreme religion of the West. In the past half century, with the arrival of movies, pop music, and Hallmark (all of which rely on sentimentality to seduce us), romance has become our chosen form of worship, and what was once a quest for oneness with God (spiritual perfection) is now the quest for twoness: emotional satisfaction through the comforts and pleasures of "love." Ironic again, then, that romance really did begin as a spiritual ideal, way back when, with the Christian knights, the Crusades, Arthur and the Round Table, Robin Hood and Maid Marion, and those troubadours that traveled the land, telling beautiful lies about it all.

As children, our first taste of romance comes from those tales of knights, slaying dragons and saving beautiful damsels in distress. Archetypally (as any Jungian psychotherapist will tell you), the dragon signified the sexual passions, while the maiden (virgin) represented the spiritual virtue that is "rescued" by overcoming them.

The knights (Parsifal, Lancelot, et al.) questing for the Holy Grail signified the soul seeking its feminine half (inner self), in order to attain wisdom (the goddess Sophia) and wholeness. Hence, the knights (historically represented by the Knights Templar and other monk-like orders) were indeed celibate.

The knights were wanderers, likewise the troubadours who came after them. The troubadours sung songs, recited poems and told tales of the knights' heroic and selfless exploits. Such songs and tales inspired the common people with the notion of the romantic quest, and answered the longing in their hearts.

Gradually, these poetic, abstract ideas (potent with Christian mystery and magic) were hijacked by the more profane interests of the folk, those of marriage and mating. This was such a powerful, instinctive drive that it had little trouble imposing itself on the more refined spiritual concepts of romance. Hence, "romantic love" as we think of it today was born: the desire for a soul mate who will satisfy our physical/emotional needs, and save us from

loneliness.

Nowadays, instead of looking for fulfillment through a relationship with God, we look for salvation through the sexual-emotional gratification of "relationships." As anyone who has attempted a lasting relationship knows, it doesn't work that way. "Romantic love" that seeks completion in another person is just another word for blind obsession.

There's an obscure folk tale about love and lust that I think encapsulates this conundrum nicely. It's not an especially cheerful tale, but then, romantic stories



rarely are.

Once upon a time, a young troubadour (with a special fondness for mushrooms of the hallucinogenic variety) fell in love with a local woman and proposed to marry her. He resolved to lay down his guitar (the same guitar he had used to woo and seduce his beloved), settle down into the quiet life as a husband and father, and leave his wandering days behind him. At the last moment, however, his lady love (as fallible humans sometimes do) had a change of heart, and ran off with another man. Devastated and embittered by this betrayal, our troubadour picked up his guitar and resumed his wanderings. Only now (his heart filled with despair where once hope had been) the songs he sang were bitter and melancholy, songs of hate in place of love. His anger extended to women everywhere, whom he now believed were duplicitous and malevolent creatures. He preached a cruel gospel, that all women should be destroyed, if men were ever to find peace. In short (and due in part perhaps to those *hongos*), he lost his marbles.

Time passed, however, and our bitter bard mellowed, and one day he fell in love again. At which time (humans being whimsical creatures), he changed his tune, and began again to sing of love and happiness. This time, his lady love remained long enough for them to marry, and they conceived a child together. Then one day, when the child was still small, the troubadour's happiness came tumbling down,

through the intervention of a cruel and capricious Fate.

There was an accident (some tales blame soldiers on horseback, others a runaway truck): the poet's beloved was struck down in the road and killed. The poet was distraught. He believed that all his bitter exhortations against womankind had come back to punish him, that his old rage, wanting revenge, had taken his new bride from him. He took the child and returned to his beloved's homeland, to tell her family the dire news (she was from a faraway place-let's say the USA-where customs were very different, and the poet was a stranger). There, misfortune struck again. The father of the departed wife, a powerful merchant and public figure of much renown, angry and bitter over the loss of his daughter, had the young troubadour thrown in jail, and his child taken from him.

The poet languished in prison for a long period: all hope was gone, and none would hear his pleas. Eventually he was released, he returned to his homeland without his child (too afraid to seek it out lest the angry father have him seized again). This time the troubadour returned from his travels a profoundly changed man. He had loved and lost, and hated, then loved again and lost again, and now he was now no longer capable of hatred. But nor could he love in quite the same way as he once had, for love and hate co-exist as twin poles of a single obsession, take the one away, and the nature of the other is forever altered.

Now he loves the way a poet must, the abstract way. Not the substance but the principle of love is his food, and his children are his songs. The hard way he learned to appreciate the essence and spirit of love, in place of personal desire, knowing that the latter would always fail him in the end (death made sure of that), but the former, never. For even death has no dominion over love.

In Western romances, the only permissible ending is "they lived happily ever after." The tale of the troubadour shows that happiness comes from wisdom and experience alone, not from any circumstances. In fact, the troubadour eventually *did* meet another woman (third time lucky?) and they *did* live happily ever after (until they died). But that was only because the poet had stopped looking for his happiness in women.

Some will relate to this tale and nod their heads and agree. Others will tut and say that it is gloomy and cynical, and that no man is an island. But what else would we expect in a culture that considers solitude to be synonymous with loneliness? If the human heart is a Labyrinth, romantic love must be the Minotaur.

The moral of the story? Like those knights of old, we can't expect to win the maiden, until we have slain our dragons.

The Jaguar of Light Update

Edited by: Leandro Veron

Last month, *Oaxaca Times* printed the story of the Jaguar of Light, a jaguar caught by Lachixlan villagers who were concerned for their cattle. Despite avid interest from the public and many non-profit groups, the jaguar still remains in captivity, in Yaguar Xoo. He was due to be released in November, but it has taken time for the government and those working to help the animal to decide where to release him and how to prevent the situation from reoccurring. The jaguar is presently being tested for diseases to make sure he is free from infection upon his release.

There is good news, however, and not only for the Jaguar of Light. Experts have developed a national plan for the conservation of the jaguar (an endangered species). Among other initiatives, this plan involves organizing community surveillance committees to prevent poaching and to lower livestock-related conflicts. In coordination with many departments of the federal government, various actions are being planned and implemented to address the issue, including a national jaguar symposium. The goal is to gather and organize all existing research and to make it readily available for those involved in creating a solution towards the jaguar's survival, the means for villagers to make a living and the ecology of farming and agriculture.



The Road Not (To Be) Taken

The people's fight against the Libramiento Norte

By Leandro Veron

Modernization has its price, but sometimes it's sold for more than its worth. Such is the story of the Libramiento Norte. In what may be a repeat of history, locals are preparing to fight the development of a diversion on the north side of the city.

El Libramiento Norte was built in 1990 despite strong opposition from the public. Rapid growth, and especially a great increase in automobiles, had become a mounting problem, which the diversion was meant to alleviate by reducing traffic congestion and air pollution.

However, the road threatened the ecological balance of the land on which it

was built. The area through which it runs is in fact considered part of a national park (declared in 1937 by President Lazaro Cadenas) and the home of hundreds of species. It is also the last water reservoir of the Central Valleys. Since the road was built, locals have noticed a decrease in water availability, and further shortages are expected if the road is opened. A 1998 study by *Technologie Ecologia y Ambiente* showed the road to be dangerously defective. General public dissent has kept the road closed, but that may change.

Despite public opinion, ecological implications and safety hazards, political battles may result in the road being re-developed. Last year, a PRI-controlled

Federal Congress channeled funds into road-building projects all over Mexico, including the Libramiento Norte. Ironically, this was done in the hopes of gaining popularity. For newly-elected local (PRI) officials, this road is a priority.

For PRO-OAX, an organization dedicated to preserving the historical and environmental heritage of Oaxaca, impeding the opening of the road is imperative. Francisco Toledo and other concerned *Oaxaqueños* are taking up the bull horn to rouse residents in the city, San Felipe del Agua, San Luis Beltran and other municipalities to organize a block.

Despite ample evidence to back their position, PRO-OAX is expecting a harder fight this time around. They are presently preparing for in-situ demonstrations and possible hunger strikes; they are even ready to stand in the way of construction machinery if necessary.

Those interested in signing the petition against the re-development of the Libramiento Norte, please contact *Oaxaca Times* at: info@oaxacatimes.com

