

Neruda y Emma: A Poem by Andrés Ajens

Neruda y Emma

Semblance with no semblance, be quick pure hunger
with no compare, now Raquel and Neftalí
are ~~crossing~~ themselves in a passage of the Book
of Jonah, deserted, waiting to be written.

Baleen vomit from such oceanic myth,
Jonah rims the shore-rim, spies who's coming:
there Raquel, there Neftalí. Me, I don't care
much for the Chascona anymore, the faun

confesses, flabbergasted. Never, Nef-
talit, did I dream of being myself here.
Semblance with no semblance, Emma and Neruda,
nerudiemma, cervid, abattis.

--Andrés Ajens

[translated by Kent Johnson]

Note:

The poem is written for the poet-scholar Emma Villazón, companion of Andrés Ajens. The original Spanish version is below. Villazón died of a stroke at El Alto airport, Bolivia, in 2015, at the age of 34, returning from a reading abroad. At the time of her death, she was widely considered one of the leading younger poets of the Andean region. Raquel (Rachel) and Neftalí are both Biblical names; Raquel is Emma Villazón's given middle name and Neftalí is one of Neruda's given middle names (Ricardo Eliécer Neftalí Reyes Basoalto changed his name to Pablo Neruda in the mid-1920s). The Chascona, located in Santiago and now a museum, is the name of one of Neruda's three large homes. Ajens read the above poem in a tribute event to Villazón, held at La Chascona, in August, 2018. Villazón's books are *Fábulas de una caída* (2007), *Lumbre con ciervos* (2013), and *Temporarias y otros poemas* (2016, posthumous). [KJ]

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Neruda y Emma

Como sin como, apura hambre
incomparable, Raquel y Neftalí
se ~~cruzan~~ en un pasaje del Libro
de Jonás, desierto, por escribir.

Vómito de tan insólito mítico pez,
Jonás orilla la orilla, los ve venir: ahí
está Raquel, ahí, Neftalí. *Me aburrí
de la chascona*, confiesa de golpe

chiripa el ciervo. *Jamás, Neftalí,
soñé con estarme aquí.*
Como sin como, Emma y Neruda,
nerudiemma, cérvida, abatís.