



# *English Studies in Latin America*

## **City of Cloud and Stone**

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## City of Cloud and Stone

Phillip Barron<sup>1</sup>

for Nancy

It's just me and the bag of lemons  
we bought from her,  
selling citrus and eggshell  
pomegranate passionfruit  
with the white caviar inside  
outside the UNESCO zone  
while her children climbed  
through bars and played  
hide&seek  
behind porcelain zebra  
legs. The little one on her back,  
tucked in colorful cloth,  
dreamed of Atahualpa's new empire  
and the peaceful era

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<sup>1</sup> Phillip Barron has taught philosophy at the University of North Carolina and now teaches poetry and digital humanities at the University of California, Davis. He is a member of the Squaw Valley Community of Writers. "City of Cloud and Stone" was written in 2010 while the poet lived in Quito, Ecuador.

to which all Inca warriors felt entitled  
after years of brotherly war.

The idea of a city forms in flashes  
of neon,  
sodium vapor street lights,  
screeching jet engines,  
oval swimming pools,  
and empty embassies  
through the half-open window.

A sister climbs on her brother's shoulders,  
and with scrofulous hands he tosses her  
three of the six balls they juggle  
at stoplight changes  
for change. Her uncut hair  
loops back on itself,  
wrapped in a pale blue ribbon.

The light flickers green  
across the bus lines,  
meridians of this equatorial  
city. Rain crawls out from hiding  
just as I pay the driver,  
its gathering water  
tells stories in the streets.