
South America

Juan Carlos Galeano

Juan Carlos Galeano was born in the Amazon region of Colombia in 1958 and moved to the United States in 1983. His poetry, translations, and essays have been published in journals in Latin America, the United States, and Europe. He teaches Latin American Poetry at Florida State University. In "Eraser," he develops an intriguing metaphor about "erasing" the past to create room for the future. But how much of it can we erase without obliterating our identity? And can we distinguish between erasing places and people?

ERASER

to Roberto Fernández

The man who needs space in his mind for important things
rubs a giant eraser on his forehead every night.

He erases many thoughts of his homeland, and every day he wakes up
with fewer square miles of memories.

His parents tell him to erase carefully, not to get so carried away,
that one day he may end up erasing them, too.

The man assures them that he has had a lot of practice, that he only erases
the lands and things that aren't important.

He says that he knows how to strip the trees of their leaves and let
the houses and people go untouched.

translated by Delia Peey

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Juan Carlos Galeano was born in the Amazon region of Colombia in 1958 and moved to the United States in 1983. He teaches Latin American poetry at Florida State University. In "Tree," a resonant and suggestive poem, the poet describes the relationship between man and his environment. Is the tone here playful? ● or deadly serious?

TREE

to Frederick De Armas

A man in love with a tree goes to live with him awhile before getting married.

"Now you no longer need to look for sunshine, water, or food," his friends say.

Every night the man combs the tree's hair and then
they sit down to tea with their friends, the planets and the closest stars.

Life and the environmental magazines tell their love story to the entire world.

But one day the man gets tired of seeing the same faces of the sun, the moon, and
the stars.

Relatives, environmentalists, and their best friends, the stars, come and ask him
why he doesn't want to live with the tree anymore.

The man tells them that he is thinking of marrying a river, a cloud, or something
more versatile.

translated by Delia Poey