

**Las Abejas, The Bees**

**--Vivian Demuth**

-- Chiapas, Mexico

As a child, I was stung by a bee on the way to a witch's house.  
Now, as I watch the bees of Chiapas harmonizing, swarming  
in a group like bees do, humming peaceful torments of death,  
I wonder if I am ready for the machete of pain. In Canada,  
insects are biting the dust of colony collapse disorder but not  
these mournful female bees, adorned in handwoven shawls  
and black wool skirts, they sing to chew memory alive. They sing  
of las abejas, the civil society of bees who hummed for peace  
in December '97 and got a paramilitary handshake into a mass grave.  
In the trance of this chanting, I see orange marigolds scenting for truth  
in the underworld. I see pregnant women with ripped open wombs,  
rocking dead fetuses and murmuring names. I see 49 dead  
people blessing Catholic priests with pine boughs and I see barefoot  
children who cannot sleep and drunk paramilitaries who can.  
So I sip a little of their communal nectar and as the music crescendos,  
a five-foot-two bee clasps me in her warm hand, she who was stung  
in Acteal, stops to comfort me, "*Mira,*" she says and points,  
"Isn't it beautiful, the folk dancing?"