

# AZAHARES 2025



*Spanish Literary Magazine*

# AZAHARES 2025

*Azahares* is University of Arkansas-Fort Smith's award-winning Spanish-language literary magazine. The primary purpose of this magazine is to provide students and community members with an arena for creative expression in the Spanish language, as well as a literary space for writing that presents the themes of the Latino experience. The *azahar*, or orange blossom, is a flower of special meaning. Representative of new life and purity, *azahares* form part of the iconic tradition of the Spanish-speaking world, embodying a freshness of spirit and perspective captured with this publication. *Azahares* highlights student work, as well as the creative endeavors of the greater Fort Smith community and beyond.

## Executive Editor

Dr. Mary A. Sobhani

## Editorial Board

Gray Langston  
Madeline Martínez-Santiago  
Dr. Lynda McClellan

## Student Editors

Grecia González  
Viviana Preston

## Supervising Designer

Colin McLain

## Lead Designer

Olivia Thompson

## Cover Illustration

Olivia Thompson

## Design Team Members

Crystal Kilby  
Kaylea Denham

Special thanks to the following: Dr. Terisa Riley, chancellor; Dr. Shadow Robinson, provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs; Dr. Toni Alexander, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences; and Dr. Paulette Meikle, associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. The views and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of the University of Arkansas – Fort Smith or the *Azahares* Editorial Board. *Azahares* 2025 is funded through generous contributions from Vistas Higher Learning, the UAFS International Relations Program, and the UAFS Department of World Languages.

In memory of Dr. Lynda McClellan, dearly loved colleague and friend.

**IGLESIA DEL SEÑOR DE ARARÓ**  
**MICHOACÁN, MÉXICO**  
**FOTOGRAFÍA DIGITAL**



**Ariana Caballero**



# Table of Contents

IGLESIA DEL SEÑOR DE ARARÓ .....PORTADA INTERIOR <i>ARIANA CABALLERO</i>	JOSÉ.....24 <i>ERIK PETERS</i>	SPICE OF LIFE.....58 <i>GABO ALVARADO-LIEBER</i>	VIAJE DE SANGRE .....80 <i>EVAN MCCLELLAN</i>
FAMILY COLORS .....4 <i>BRENDA LILIANA JOVEL</i>	VÁLGAME, TECOLOTZIN (SAVE ME, LORD OWL).....28 <i>TOMÁS BAIZA</i>	EL AMOR NUNCA MUERE.....59 <i>LESLIE MENDOZA</i>	LA DESPEDIDA.....81 <i>EVAN MCCLELLAN</i>
UNTITLED .....7 <i>MARIO LOPRETE</i>	MOJADOS.....30 <i>NATALIA MEJÍA</i>	ALEBRIJES DE SMITHER PARK.....60 <i>SANDRA SOFÍA SMITHERS</i>	ABUELITA'S CARDS .....82 <i>VERONICA PUENTE</i>
PARA TI, MI HIJA.....8 <i>LESLIE MENDOZA</i>	GERM CASINO .....31 <i>ANGELICA ESQUIVEL</i>	SAW-CHEE .....64 <i>ERIK PETERS</i>	FUNERALS.....86 <i>LISA LÓPEZ SMITH</i>
13 DAYS .....9 <i>TOMÁS BAIZA</i>	PARA MIS PAPÁS .....32 <i>DANY MORALES HERNÁNDEZ</i>	A LA MUJER EN MI PIEL.....67 <i>DANIEL BARRY</i>	BARRIO GETSEMANÍ .....87 <i>VIVIANA PRESTON</i>
FERRALLISTA.....10 <i>V. RODRIGO</i>	OUR SCHOOL ROUTINE.....34 <i>JULISSA BELTRAN</i>	COCA-COLA (1) - IN CEMENTO VERITAS .....68 <i>MARIO LOPRETE</i>	LA SAL DE LA TIERRA .....88 <i>VIVIANA PRESTON</i>
ARARÓ .....11 <i>ARIANA CABALLERO</i>	6E.....35 <i>GABO ALVARADO-LIEBER</i>	COCA-COLA (2) - IN CEMENTO VERITAS .....69 <i>MARIO LOPRETE</i>	MACETA AZUL.....90 <i>CLAUDIA EXCARET SANTOS CAMPUSANO</i>
THE MEXICAN SUN .....12 <i>ERIK PETERS</i>	PLAYA EN EL ATARDECER.....36 <i>GOKU G AKA CÉSAR BRIZUELA</i>	ALGUNAS PREGUNTAS DE QUIEN TRABAJA EN CASA.....70 <i>RUBÉN FLORES</i>	21 QUESTIONS BY AN IMMIGRANT .....92 <i>LESLIE MENDOZA</i>
THE TROUBLE WITH MAY.....13 <i>LISA LÓPEZ SMITH</i>	EARTH IS A NURSING ROCK .....38 <i>STEVEN VALENZUELA</i>	UN INSTANTE.....70 <i>SANTIAGO DE RÁBAGO-LEÓN</i>	LISTA DE CONTRIBUIDORES.....94
LOSING YOU IN THE SMOKE.....14 <i>JULISSA BELTRAN</i>	DREAMER.....50 <i>ROGER CAMP</i>	HÉROES.....71 <i>J.E. ALAMO</i>	THE WORLD LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT AT UAFS.....98
SANTA EVITA .....15 <i>STEVE DAVIDSON</i>	ADORNANDO LAS CALLES DE MI ALMA .....52 <i>ARIANA CABALLERO</i>	SCLERAZYGOTE.....76 <i>ANGELICA ESQUIVEL</i>	ABOUT THIS YEAR'S DESIGNS AND LAYOUT.....99
EL ECO PERDIDO .....21 <i>GRAY COLLIER LANGSTON</i>	NEW WORLD .....54 <i>GABO ALVARADO-LIEBER</i>	ROMANCE DE LOS OLIVOS .....77 <i>SANTIAGO DE RÁBAGO-LEÓN</i>	CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS.....100
LIBÉLULA.....22 <i>VÍCTOR MANUEL RAMOS</i>	A BLUE-PRINTED CEMETERY .....55 <i>JULISSA BELTRAN</i>	LA SELVA.....78 <i>SANDRA SOFÍA SMITHERS</i>	ELECTRICITY ..... CONTRATAPA INTERIOR <i>ANGELICA ESQUIVEL</i>
ESENCIAL COSTA RICA .....23 <i>NINA MAAR</i>	CAFÉ CON LECHE, MI AMOR.....56 <i>ISABELLA MORENO</i>		



## FAMILY COLORS

Your brother has deep blue eyes that resemble the crashing waves on a beach. His skin is light, undoubtedly close to Snow White's pearly tone. His hair is a soft chestnut brown, perfectly curly that any ringlet could easily wrap around his finger.

You have dark brown eyes, the same as your parents and the rest of the family. Your skin is a deep olive that never burns in the sun. Your hair is also curly, but unruly and misshapen; and in deep need of an overdue haircut.

Your tías adore your brother. They always compliment the brightness of the skin, and there is a slight envy in their raspy tones as they look at their own children with indifference. They pinch his full cheeks until they grow red and ask him about school. He is currently a senior in high school, anxious for graduation so that he can finally move away. He plans to attend a college in San Francisco and study art history and graphic design. Your brother has always had a creative touch while you struggled with drawing a basic cartoon cat.

Your parents do not care what he studies, as long as he is happy. They do not care if he lives five hours away; they say they will drive to visit when they can.

You are a sophomore in high school ready to abandon the place you call home. You dream of moving away like your brother, but to Maine or Boston where you can enjoy solitude and peace. Your parents tell you that it is best to stay close to home; they say they'd like to know about your whereabouts and assure your safety. They say you should study medicine or law, but you prefer public policy or political science. They do not know nor care what you'd like to study; they care that you can make a living for yourself after graduation. They do not tell your brother these things. Instead they help him pack his leftover items for his move. Your mother carefully folds his jeans and thick sweaters into boxes until they cover his entire bedroom floor. Your father gifts your brother an iPad, says it'll be helpful for his drawings and other ingenious designs.

One day you are with your brother in his room as he packs his remaining trinkets into boxes.

"Will you miss us?" you say.

He murmurs something, doesn't look up from his hands. "Yeah."

"Will you miss me?"

He then turns to look at you, his blue eyes looking deep into your brown ones. You never noticed until now, but you and your brother have the same eye shape and nose. You share the most prominent features of the human face, yet his are more desirable.

"Eh, I guess. I don't have anyone to bother or annoy over there."

An unwilling smile crosses your lips. You kneel down next to him and study the shape of his curls. They look bouncy, rich with life and smell of rosemary and mint. Your hair lies flat against your back, frizzy as if a balloon had just been rubbed on it.

"Send me photos. I've heard San Francisco is really pretty. Oh! And go to cafes and send them to me so I can go when I visit."

"Sí, sí. Here, help me pack."

You help with packing school supplies, posters, and photos. Your brother has always loved capturing every moment in life. Images of yourself flash before your eyes. There is one where you are playing with your dolls from many years ago. There is another with you and your mother at the park, both of you eating ice creams from the paletero. Other photos are of his friends and perhaps past girlfriends he has never told you about. But there is one that catches your attention.

It is a family photo. Your parents are sitting beside each other on the old family couch – you recognize the leather material, and the squeaky sound it would always make when someone sat on it suddenly echoes in your head. Next to your dad is your brother. He looks around ten or eleven years old in this photo, but what captures your attention is not even your child-self in the photo, but rather the awe and grace of your parents' expression towards your brother. They both look at him with their

deep chocolate eyes and never once seem to glance or even notice your small frame at the edge of the couch. Your brother didn't seem to notice their stare because he is facing the camera with both front rows of his teeth gleaming against the flash.

You are looking at the ground in the photo. There is no smile or glint of joy in your downturned eyes. And suddenly, you remember this day as clear as snow. It was your tío taking this photo at a small family gathering one night. You had just eaten a bowl of ice cream with chocolate sauce on top, but the dessert hadn't made you dreary in this photo. It had been the simple look your parents had given your brother, and your brother's lack of awareness towards their idolization inflamed your sour little heart.

It didn't matter if you had your parents' brown eyes, or the same messy hair your mother always complained about. It didn't matter if your skin glowed against the warmth of the summer sun.

Your brother was their adoration, their most prized possession in life because of his unique features. It had always been like this, and even now the realization burned like a flame against a candle.

You will always be the shadow behind his glowing presence. You will always fall second behind your brother. He is the apple of their eye, the gift that little baby Jesús brought to them many years ago. You were not a gift nor ever wanted. Your brother had been enough, but an accident must always arise between young parents. They thought you'd turn out the same, but when they saw the muddled color of your eyes and skin so alike like theirs, they dismissed you and chose to only protect their golden child.

You tuck the photo into the sleeve of an album, pretend that your jealousy is a sinful emotion, and smile that your brother will at least miss you.

At least he will miss you.

**Brenda Liliana Jovel**

**UNTITLED**  
**OIL ON CONCRETE**



**Mario Loprete**

## PARA TI, MI HIJA

Soy fuerte porque soy fuerte,  
No porque es la suma de mis traumas.  
Te doy más que el dolor de generaciones,  
Porque eso no es un regalo,  
Sino cosas de la vida,  
Pero no es la vida.

Tenemos el universo  
En nuestras venas  
Y en nuestro pasado y presente  
Viven todas las mujeres  
Que vinieron antes de nosotras.

La habilidad de tu tía  
De poder buscar y encontrar  
Lo bello en las personas.

Tu prima con los rizos y  
Su eterno cariño a todos los animales.

El corazón tierno de tu abuela  
Cuando cocina, porque ella dice  
Que el mejor ingrediente  
Es el amor.

Tu prima, la menor,  
Y su infinita dedicación a crear arte,  
Tanto es, que cuando se enteró que vienes  
Me dijo, "Yo le enseñaré todo  
Lo que sé sobre dibujar y pintar!"

La risa contagiosa de tu tía, la mayor,  
Que convierte un silencio  
A un cuarto de carcajadas.

Hay tanto más que puedo escribir  
Y con el tiempo lo haré,  
Porque soy tu mamá, una poeta,  
Y te regalo mis palabras  
Ahora y mañana.  
Y te heredó no solo la resiliencia  
De nuestras ancestras,  
Pero también te heredó el regalo mágico  
De ser una mujer de primavera.  
Que a través de los inviernos  
Mas fríos de vida  
Siempre, pero siempre,  
Aflorecemos.

**Leslie Mendoza**

## 13 DAYS

Every June, for 13 days, I go a little mad.

Each night, I sleep awake, and each day, I  
walk asleep, and for almost two weeks the  
world is a twisting, kaleidoscopic maze.

A dilapidated memory palace where  
every chamber is furnished and staged  
by architects who would never choose  
to live in the place that they've prepared  
for me. In every room, on every wall, are  
pictures of you.

Asleep.

Awake.

Staring intently at me through  
newborn-gray eyes.

I sit on a swaybacked bed, next to an  
oak chest that guards a stuffed tiger, its  
terrycloth fur stained black by strangers'  
donated A-negative that bubbled from  
sutures that never healed and never helped.

Beneath the tiger, a plastic envelope of dark  
brown hair which I don't fucking dare open  
or I'll

eat it, or

burn it, or

snort the ashes, or

in my annual madness, devise some other way  
to get you inside of me, so deep under my skin  
that tattoos of Quetzalcoatl and cuauhtli and  
huitzil shiver in your presence.

For 13 cycles I wander this laberinto de  
memoria that to everyone else is just the  
summer solstice.

Solstice. *Sōlstitium*.

A cruel pausing of the sun.

**Tomás Baiza**

## FERRALLISTA

oblaciones se repartirán a los que me cosechaban  
piel crecida en piscinas de veneno  
al vano de belleza a salvo malpurezada  
refinerías recatadas vuelta hacia mí

hacia un mar que me bautiza  
mi garganta al fin escapara un canto  
se la dedico a luz que no perdona  
rendidos en brazos calados

¿será que mi antiguo nombre pasará por mi  
colorada en luto?

nafragada en un reinado hecho lizo  
a cartón y hostias sostienen un imperio y no la patria  
plomo o plata, le bailaré a las dos  
al latido de una oración y te quedas  
con el cambio mi amor

calor a mi piel vuelve a vapor para la sibil  
la inquietud trae un mensaje  
escondido en el meollo del pozo  
encerrados los pétalos de fe y en los férreo  
de hambre nos abrirán entre aguas crudas

**V. Rodrigo**

## ARARÓ MICHOACÁN, MÉXICO FOTOGRAFÍA DIGITAL



**Ariana Caballero**

## THE MEXICAN SUN

The grey sky glowers down through the window, dark and dangerous, threatening rain but not yet hurling it earthward. Tired limbs settle, the rocking chair does its work, weary muscles unclench.

I close my eyes and, in my own personal gloom, the sharp-edged world dulls. The day's deeds tumble through my mind: chaotic, disordered, forcing themselves forward, before quickly fading away. In the kitchen, the kettle sings, there is a splash, the happy clink of mugs striking one another.

"Here," Ana's voice is warm and bright, "this will help."

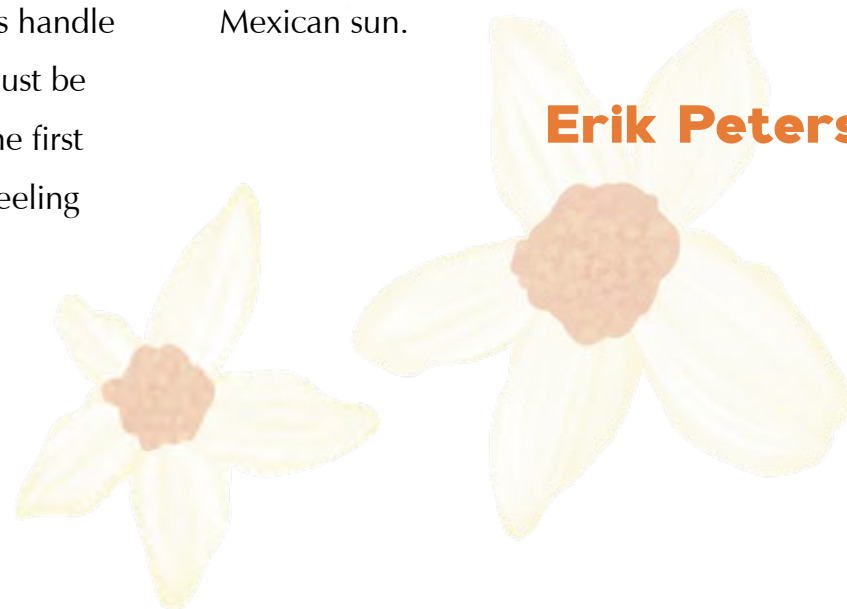
I don't see, but feel, the mug's handle sliding between my fingers: she must be burning herself on its hot sides. The first sip scalds me. I say nothing. The feeling will be lost soon.

She is talking now, her Mexican lilt trills through the room, my personal gloom brightens. Spanish words frolic with their English neighbours: her smiling face flits in among the day's doings. They retreat before her.

When I open my eyes, the mug is half full. She is still talking, caressing me with words. The week's work melts away, renewed muscles revel in their fatigue. Outside, the West-Coast sky glowers down, dark and dangerous and the first cold droplets dash themselves against the window.

Inside, I bask in the warmth of the Mexican sun.

**Erik Peters**



## THE TROUBLE WITH MAY

is that it's too hot for poetry—  
dry yellow hills punctured  
only by thorny huizache,  
the sky just a gray-ze haze,  
cardboard breeze in swirling swoops  
of dust, bits of plastic, dead leaf  
funnels that nearly reach the haze.  
The humourless vet,  
leaning over my dog's weepy eye, says  
*no puede estar en el polvo o el viento*.  
The trouble with May is  
death, nothing moves, nothing happens,  
until the boys grab the long bamboo posts  
topped with wire hooks, we go to the  
scraggly  
fields out back where every day  
more guamuchiles come ripe, changing  
in their bean pods from closed and green  
to exploding open in blossoms  
of white and pink. The afternoon

sun barely starts to scratch  
the horizon. The sheep are specks  
of colour as they wander in the pasture,  
seeking out fragments of green  
where the heat hasn't killed everything.  
The bees find the closest thing to a blossom  
and the trees hum with activity, the hens  
diligently hide nests, the swallows  
mud pack together a little home  
in the rafters, month old lambs  
find a shady corner and stretch out flat—  
head and legs and belly  
pressed to the dead grass, a holy  
wait. A new  
cactus sprouts  
out of the composting  
piece of itself.

**Lisa López Smith**



## LOSING YOU IN THE SMOKE

**TW: Substance Abuse**

As my eyes lay shut,  
you are the movement of fog  
and a never-ending tangle of my gut.  
You lay in between each stroke as it  
swims in you.

My mind never daring to cut the heart  
of its lifeline.

As time stows away in my pocket,  
your corpse is converted into the  
mounts of pills  
and the years of stolen smoke.

Wonder and ungiven hope of salvation;  
seeing that clouds were not clouds  
but the reality of your suffocation.

Roadmaps of my hands lay upon your heart  
carving the movement of the ocean.  
The ground always unsteady but alive.  
Leaning backward  
hoping to be caught  
by the reason of your despair.

The only solution is to fall apart.  
Fingertips claw and cut your chest open.  
Now fighting red against an open wound,  
watching the years of pain decay.

The meaning of laced pain  
sits in the ocean of my own.  
Watching it take white  
specks of your being home,  
becoming part of the earth's shore  
once again.

**Julissa Beltran**

## SANTA EVITA



One spring evening  
I was having dinner  
with my good friend  
Kenji Tanaka, a Silicon  
Valley engineer. We  
were dining at the lush

Plumed Horse restaurant in Saratoga on  
oysters, pork chops, and rosé champagne.  
By and by, the conversation segued,  
somehow, from the Stanford Linear  
Accelerator to Latin America, and thence  
to that beloved paragon, Evita. We kicked  
around a few views of the controversy,  
then moved on to other topics. After a  
while, having finished eating, we pleasantly  
said our goodbyes.

However, I couldn't get this interesting,  
and important, Latin American lady off  
my mind.

Evita is, to paraphrase Churchill,  
a mystery, inside a riddle, wrapped in  
diamonds. The intelligentsia, and denizens  
south, appear dumbfounded by *complex  
categories*. There is, in the human psyche,  
a profound craving for *riveting simplicities*.

Black or white. Right or wrong.  
Good or bad.

Individuals who display a *combination  
of traits* are, well, a little befuddling.

Thus, Eva Duarte. Born painfully  
poor, ignored, barely loved. But brilliant,  
beautiful, talented, and ambitious. She  
emigrated in her teenage years from the  
countryside into glamorous Buenos Aires,  
city of opportunities. She progressed  
remarkably quickly, and soon, in her  
twenties, was a professional presenter, on  
a radio station.

She eventually met, then married, the  
politician Juan Perón, who impressed her  
as not only a man with a future, but as a  
man of the people—that is, someone who  
pursued power, but partly, genuinely, on  
behalf of the poor and the powerless. Evita  
herself desired to occupy the *Casa Rosada*,  
and to live a high life of wealth, fashion,  
fame, and international connections;  
nonetheless, even as First Lady, *she never  
abandoned her roots, never lost her  
affection for the poor, and always stood*

*up, bravely, for women and families.*  
That is, she was a *blend of qualities*.

Some dramatic self-seeking, yes. But she was, her entire life, to her untimely death, a woman on a mission—*generous, caring, and respectful and encouraging to those in desperate need of respect and encouragement*. She remains a symbol of what poor women can accomplish if they enlist their talents in the service of self-esteem and high ambition.

Evita is ...from a certain imaginative angle...*immortal!*

### **The Miracle of Science**

Rumor has it—some say a *myth*—that the Argentine Institute of Science and the Chilean Institute of Science have created a tunnel, the Western Simplon Tunnel, under the Andes, connecting the two countries. On the Argentine side, the entrance to the tunnel is near the city of Neuquén, by the head of Patagonia. The exact location is, of course, a state secret.

The primary purpose of the tunnel is to create a secure location for an international linear accelerator, to do high-energy physics research. But a side benefit

of the tunnel is that, for some selected purposes, a tremendous amount of energy is available.

Doctors, using her DNA, were... *miraculously*...able to reconstitute Evita, after a fashion. But to energize her, and allow her to speak, required a huge amount of energy. Therefore, the contemporary Evita resides, if that is the right word, depending on the energy available, in a relaxing luxury suite in the Simplon Tunnel.

At a certain point, it was announced, in vaguely creative circles, that Evita would give a speech in the institute's conference room. Of course, I was very interested to hear that, and, through various professional connections, was able to wrangle an invitation.

Therefore ...I flew down to Argentina, and took the luxury train, the Pampas-Simplon Express, west, across the pampas, to arrive near the institute's entrance at the foot of the Andes Mountains. Then, a shuttle carried us, via a circuitous route, to the institute.

The host, Professor Vega, welcomed us, and offered us coffee and tea, and rum-and-sugar crescent rolls.

The conference room is spare, but elegant and dignified—wood-paneled, with dark bronze-colored carpeting, furnished with chairs of black leather and rose-gold metal. We were all comfortably seated, then we anxiously awaited the arrival of Santa Evita, through an industrial-strength, green steel door, at the end of the room, leading into the mountain.

### **The Entrance**

Exactly on time, Evita glided out through the doorway and into the conference room, dazzling everyone, including the assembled reporters. Royal blue suit, pale blue blouse, pearl necklace. Perfect figure. Perfect grooming. Looking as good as she ever did. There were those bright eyes, and that warm, sincere smile which, in an instant, could, and did, light up a thousand dark lives.

With doctors, in white lab coats, on each side, monitoring her for safety, she settled into her chair at the head of the long wooden conference table. Then she began to speak, to us, and into microphones, in carefully measured tones, but with grace and assurance.

### **EVITA'S LAST SPEECH (Translated)**

*My people, I bring you rainbows—of health, of a living income, of a beautiful life, of freedom. You are always on my mind, and in my heart. And you always will be.*

*My people, we are full of Grace. You grow stronger every day—in faith, in hope, in wisdom. Mothers, who generate the nation, who support the nation, who are the nation—I salute you. I love you.*

*My people, together, we will forge a New Argentina—one of equality, one of justice, one of prosperity for all. A nation where the descamisados shall stand as tall as the privileged and the wealthy. A nation where the power shall shift from the Lion, to the Lamb.*

*I promise you this: I am with you in your struggles. I am one of you. The least of you, to others, is the greatest, to me.*

*And I promise you this: I will not flag nor fail, no matter how long the fight for that fair play which is our due. I will be by your side, forever. This you must believe.*

*But you must promise me, too: you will not give up on yourselves. You will not give up on the glorious ideology—of*

goodness and generosity for all, by all.  
Promise me this: when, finally, the torch of justice is raised high above our great nation, banishing our long night of poverty and fear—you will be there . . . to celebrate the victory, to savor the freedom, and to share the love.

Just then, the lights flickered on and off, a distant, continuous whirring sound stuttered, Evita's eyes half-closed, her voice failed, and she weaved dangerously in her chair. The two doctors, on either side of the room, checking their monitors, sprang up, and announced that the energy of the system unexpectedly had been drained, and therefore the talk was at an end.

They helped Evita to her feet, and guided her out through the pale green steel doorway at the end of the conference room. Evita returned to the shadows . . . to her mystery.  
Then our host, Professor Vega, thanked everyone for their attendance, and for their understanding of the situation. Then, with regrets, she wished everyone a safe journey home.

### **Homeward Bound**

After listening to Evita's epochal speech, I took the elegant Pampas-Simplon Express back towards Buenos Aires. Most everyone was in the club car, having a drink, chatting excitedly, or in the dining car, having one of those gaucho dinners, so I grabbed a glass of Malbec wine, and moseyed back to the observation car, with its wonderful views of the pampas, turning copper and gold and black in the setting sun. There was only one other person back there, an athletic, middle-aged, bearded man wearing a blue military uniform, and a blue beret, with a gold star on it. He smiled and waved a cheerful hello with an unlit cigar. And so we began to talk, I, as interviewer, and he, as himself:

**I:** Che?

**EG:** The same.

**I:** Did you hear Evita's talk?

**EG:** Indeed.

**I:** What did you think?

**EG:** *Por supuesto*, Evita and I go far back. We're not so much in the news anymore, *naturalmente*, being now, largely, of a celestial persuasion. But we

still do our work, on behalf of the people. Now, as it were, behind the scenes. Behind the *cortina*.

**I:** What did you feel was the best part of her talk?

**EG:** I liked it all. When the heart is in the right place, the heart is in the right place. *Estupendo*.

**I:** It seems as if a hidden theme in what she says is that behind the public there is always some small group, off in the wings, controlling everything for its own benefit, and rolling over the people. Is that right?

**EG:** Yes, a sad tradition. We Basques—Evita, Simón Bolívar, and I, to cite three—take a different perspective. All people deserve freedom from want and oppression. It is up to the leaders, such as Simón, and Evita, to make sure that happens. Not easy, of course.

**I:** So, what is it that goes wrong?

**EG:** There is a long tradition, in the Middle East, in Europe, China, here, all around, that some elite cabal has been elevated to a privileged position—privileged to exploit the people. Then, *naturalmente*, thugs are always available,

for a fee, to enforce the political lies.

**I:** Who are these exploiters?

**EG:** Whoever seizes the power, *generalmente*. It was the Spanish, once. Bolívar threw off that yoke. Ernst Röhm, the Storm Trooper from the Weimar Republic, injected his poisons into Bolivia. The Americans, and the British, have interfered in Latin affairs. "Intelligence"—*qué lástima*—is too often "unintelligence." We ourselves have split our own loyalties, have sometimes lost our sense of healthy direction, of holistic hygiene.

The illusion remains, a fear of what looks like the impossibility of a truly sound, scientific education—the kind doctors get—afraid to believe in the equality it brings, the revolutionary empowerment it delivers, and the freedom that follows.

It is very hard for the people to say, "This is *our* country, and we have a *right* to the best knowledge, and a *right* to live well, under the guidance of a *fair government*." Echoes of the hero General Washington, whose portrait enhances the Basque *Museo Naval* in San Sebastian!

I know, as a doctor, that people in pain, with a chronic illness, have a hard

time believing, *"I have been a long time struggling with this, but, with conscious effort, over time, I can become healthy, free of affliction."*

As our conversation, after a while, was winding down, I realized the train was slowing down, so I turned around, and noticed we were approaching the Constitución train station in Buenos Aires. When I turned back to say goodbye to my very interesting travel companion, I found he had already, somehow, disappeared.

### ***Santa Evita, Para Siempre***

Present, yet absent. Absent, yet present. Perhaps it's as they say:  
*Some people, some ideas,  
some passions, some faiths...  
Never really die.*



*Pampas - Guereño*

**Steve Davidson**

## **EL ECO PERDIDO**

Un tango compuesto por  
Gray Langston

La guitarra y el piano,  
las voces de mi alma,  
son recuerdos  
tanto tiempo  
de una vida pasada.

Soy el eco perdido  
que ayer nació  
de tu voz.  
Cielo y tierra camino  
buscando tu corazón.

Soy el grito en la noche  
Que nadie escuchó.  
Busco la luz en tus ojos.  
Busco la vida en tu amor.

Quisiera que me cantaras  
lo que me cantaste una vez.  
Mi amor, te quiero, te quiero.  
Por ti, mi vida daré.

Soy una flor florecida  
de tus labios al calor.  
Sin luz y sin perfume  
lloro la ausencia  
del Sol, del Sol, del Sol.

**Gray Collier Langston**

## LIBÉLULA

Diminuta libélula,  
he visto como vuelas,  
tus alas turbias  
revoloteando incesantes  
sobre corriente translúcida,  
hecha del mismo aire  
que tú y yo respiramos.  
He visto tus ojos de cristal  
abrir y cerrar, tragar luz,  
atrapar instantes;  
toda tú suspensa  
sobre las ondas  
de cualquier estanque,  
buscando en el reflejo  
otros irises brillantes  
que distraigan del dolor,  
como hacen los tuyos.

Frágil libélula,  
ninfa solitaria,  
estás ahí esperando  
en cualquier día quejumbroso,  
mientras tu aleteo vibra  
sobre el trinar de pájaros,  
el silbido del viento,

el murmullo del agua,  
un estanque eterno  
que se derrama  
sin vaciarse.  
Toda la naturaleza ante ti,  
despojada de pretensión,  
desnuda ante el anillo de enfoque  
que se enrosca y desenrosca  
para refractar la vida  
y hacer que el mundo sea  
como tú lo ves.

Tu cuerpo iridiscente  
sería nada sin tus ojos,  
hondos cráteres que derraman lava  
en la que se podría uno disolver.

Estoy en la orilla,  
contemplándote pequeña,  
como la primera vez  
que llegaste a estas aguas  
y sentí el batir de tus alas  
en mi escarpado tórax.  
Espero a que me mires  
con esa intensidad  
alguna vez.

**Víctor Manuel Ramos**

## ESENCIAL COSTA RICA

de diez a dos  
cortan el agua  
y de tres a siete  
cortan la luz

de mis abuelos  
nadie se acuerda  
en la billetera solamente  
los pases del bus

al fondo del mar caribe  
mi cuerpo terrestre  
se erosiona  
mi cordón umbilical  
como coral se destiñe  
ultratumba marina  
en la esquina se asoma

relax, agazapado  
el gringo  
vive la pura vida

playa de arena  
porcelana  
tomando guaro al mediodía

mis huesos hechos leña  
solamente  
los zaguates  
les darán  
uso

mi paraíso tropical  
un tejido de corduroy  
cartujo

from ten to two  
they shut the water  
and from three to seven  
they cut the lights

my grandparents  
no one remembers  
in my wallet only  
money for bus rides

at the bottom of the caribbean  
my earthly body  
zerodes  
my umbilical cord  
like bleached coral  
marine after-life  
forebodes

relax, agazapado  
el gringo  
vive la pura vida

playa de arena  
porcelana  
tomando guaro al medio dia

my bones turned to scrapwood  
only  
the mutts  
will find  
useful

my tropical paradise  
of woven corduroy  
chartreuse

**Nina Maar**

## JOSÉ

Ana's mother picked us up at Mexico City International Airport. As we drove past *tiendas* and *mercados*, Aztec adventures and modern monuments to human accomplishment filled my head.

When we arrived at the home Ana grew up in, it seemed small and cluttered. My father-in-law, José, sat on his worn recliner. Dialysis and arthritis had left him homebound most days, so he spent his watching television and recollecting past glories, while his aged lab, Nala, sat loyally by his side. That night over dinner, José rambled on and on about his country. Everything my broken Spanish could catch whetted my appetite for adventure.

The next few days were a blur of excitement.  
El Museo Nacional De Antropología.  
La Catedral and La Capel de San Francisco.  
El Templo Mayor.

Crickets, pickled pigs' feet, and more tacos, enchiladas, and *sopes* than I could count.

But Moctezuma's ghost must have been watching because his revenge was both swift and terrible. Vomiting, fever, diarrhea: all the result of what Ana called 'having a whitie belly.'



After almost a week, I was able to manage the stairs. Ana set me up beside her father in the dimly-lit living room.

To my surprise, José did not turn on the television. For a long time he stared at me, then asked:

"Ana tehadicho de su familia?"

I thought hard... has... Ana... you... said... of... her... family...

"No mucho, padre. Solo un poco."

The old man grinned through his grizzled beard.

For five days José and I sat in the living room and talked. He told me about his days as a communist in university and how he'd taken a job at the airport where he'd met Ana's mother. He told me stories of Ana's childhood I'd never heard and the history of the *iglesita* where we attended mass. He told me how his wayward aunt, Jesusa, had run away from home and how, when his grandfather died young, his grandmother forsook the family fortune to find her. He told me how his father had been a *luchador* and how, when he also died young, his wife had run the family *zapatería* or cobbler's shop.



When we got back home everyone wanted to know about Mexico.

"How was the Anthropology Museum?"

"Did you climb the temples at Teotihuacán?"

"Did you try weird food?"

"Can we see the pictures?"

They were all disappointed with my booklet of notes, scratched out in a dimly lit living room.

**Erik Peters**

## VÁLGAME, TECOLOTZIN (SAVE ME, LORD OWL)

I lie awake, obsessing over  
A thousand things that  
shout and wail and keen

Big things, little things, stupid things, like  
The cringefest I used to be, that I am now,  
that I will become

The mundanities, such as  
Whether I set the coffee maker,  
scooped the cat box,  
locked the back door,  
closed the toilet seat

*Curae leves loquuntur, ingentes stupent...*  
*Minor worries chatter, but the big ones lurk*  
*silently...*

until one day when you awaken with  
a lightness of being  
teasing that maybe you've made it,  
that you've crossed some invisible  
line in your life  
that divides struggle from ease,  
agony from comfort, shadows  
from light,

but you're rewarded for your idiocy  
with a monumental,  
full-wind-up kick in the junk

Because that's how a cold, heartless  
night works

I try to speak with my oldest companion—  
the angry, young version of myself  
But the shithead mocks me and  
offers up tangled, twisted  
memories of  
sloth, idiocy, cowardice, and inaction

*Negative self-talk the sabelotodo*  
*self-help gurus call it*  
I roll over and shiver as the squirming mass  
of grown-up worries,  
of black-furred terrors with  
articulated phalanges,  
crawl silently from beneath the covers  
to nuzzle in the crook of my throat

*Shhhhhh!* they hiss in their  
Shattered-glass voices

*Nothing to see here, mi amorcito*  
*cierra los ojos, respira, duérmete, y*  
*sueña con nosotros*

I slide beneath the first, thinnest veil of sleep,  
only to be jerked back  
By a nightmare, an intruder!  
no, just a noise  
An instant before your call  
I hear you land  
your talons scrape the roof's edge

A monster, just outside my window  
Close enough to reach for  
if I were that brave

Your pure voice pulls me fully into  
The waking night, dark and ticking  
with life

Sometimes another—your partner?  
Your rival? A stranger?—answers, but tonight  
it's just you and me  
It pains me to say this, Tecolotzin,  
But my ancestors got you wrong, dead wrong  
pun intended

To them, you were Tlacatecolotl, the Owl-  
Man,  
Herald of Mictlantecuhtli  
the Lord of the Dead

The very sight of whom meant  
A one-way trip  
to Mictlán

Where our souls  
Would be tested at  
the river crossing,  
the long, lonely wait at the wall of hills,  
the snows of sorrow,  
the soul-shredding winds,  
the hail of arrows, and  
the Jaguar who eats our hearts—

To be greeted by the Lords of Death,  
Mictlantecuhtli and Mictēcacihuatl,  
who honor our struggles and  
beckon us to rest forever and ever

But here I lie, awake awake *iawake!*  
Blinking and sticky-eyed in the murk,  
    overflowing with dread for  
    the day I begin my own journey  
Thus I resolve to eat healthier food, watch  
better podcasts, take longer walks,  
And masturbate less—or never, or more,  
    I can never remember

I think of Mictlán in the abstract,  
And about how the old ways fled  
    with the coming of the friars...

Those earnest, fanatical culture-erasers  
Persistent as fire ants  
    *hormigueando* across the continent,  
    into its valleys, canyons, woods,  
deserts,  
    islands, marshlands, mountains,  
plains,  
    caverns, and most sacred dreams

Who smelled my ancestors' feather-painted  
fear  
And, like the genius zealots they were,  
    used their distress against them

Demanding, in the name of  
Their three-fanged god:  
    blind obedience,  
    unquestioned devotion,  
    and an aversion to owls  
And, admittedly, Tlacatecolotl was  
The perfect scapegoat, horns and all  
    your name was bastardized as

#### *Demonio*

But forgive me, this is where  
I must break with You  
    Quetzalcoatli! My autumn Morning  
Star

With You, Tlaloc!  
Who washes the world clean,  
    makes the earth drunk,  
    and brings the corn

With You, Tonatiuh and Huitzilopochtli!  
Sun and Hummingbird of War,  
    Eternal badasses who are not above  
    shattering this pocho's nose and  
    giving me a bad sunburn

And with You, Nonantzin,  
Mom  
    who brought me here  
    and dangled these histories just  
    out of reach  
    for too long  
No, on this one I think Athena  
And her self-absorbed groupies  
    —with their togas and oiled-up  
muscles and  
    novel ideas of the relationship  
between the  
    human and the divine  
    —they got it just right

They nailed it  
You are wisdom and patience  
You do not judge me  
    for being afraid or angry

Or weak  
For every mouse you swallow  
And kitten you steal is not a soul lost  
    but a fighting spirit sacrificed to  
    the fire that roars and spits  
    and warms us on nights so cold that  
    our blood might turn to stone and our  
    bones grow hard and crack

I long for that heat  
Feed this fire, Tecolotzin!  
*Válgame*, Lord Owl, from the cold  
    draw me into your wings, down  
among  
    the warm folds of sleep and visions

Or at least,  
For fuck's sake,  
    let me rise and wander  
    the earth fully awake.

**Tomás Baiza**

## MOJADOS

Cruzamos el río en la madrugada con la mirada en el horizonte. Ya para entonces habíamos dejado atrás la tierra conocida y el amor de quienes nos querían. El río no nos llegaba a las rodillas como nos fue prometido y nuestro equipaje diminuto se fue con la corriente. Quedamos con los pies mojados y la nostalgia de los que se fueron. Algunos ya partieron y nos ven desde el cielo, y otros morirán sin que les digamos adiós. Seguimos firmes, esperando con el pasar de los días. Tal vez el dios en que ella cree al fin nos bendiga y el futuro mejor, tantas veces prometido, llegue para ese hijo por quien arriesgamos la vida.

**Natalia Mejía**

## GERM CASINO



**Angelica Esquivel**

## PARA MIS PAPÁS

Queridos padres:

No puedo imaginar lo difícil que ha sido ir a un nuevo país, con nada y sin conocer el idioma. Las palabras no pueden expresar lo agradecida que soy, por eso les escribo esta carta.

Han sido años de trabajar noches largas y en todo tipo de empleos para ganar dinero y mantenernos, dándonos todas las oportunidades que ustedes no tuvieron. Todo esto para asegurar que la decisión de emigrar valiera la pena. Nuestras vidas habrían sido tan diferentes si se hubieran quedado en México; seríamos personas distintas, con diferentes metas en nuestras vidas. Ustedes hicieron todo lo posible para que pudiéramos vivir en esta tierra de sueños, donde todos nuestros sueños, por más imposibles o locos que parecieran, podían hacerse realidad.

Siempre les estaré agradecida por no dejarnos olvidar de dónde venimos: nuestra cultura, nuestra ascendencia, nuestra lengua materna y las tradiciones que ustedes trajeron de México.

Mexicanos-americanos, así nos llaman, pero ustedes nunca nos permitieron perder nuestra identidad mexicana y nos brindaron la experiencia americana que pudimos tener. Sé que no es la misma realidad para otras familias en situaciones similares, pero ustedes se aseguraron de que nunca olvidáramos nuestras raíces. Aunque ahora somos estadounidenses, siempre llevaremos con nosotros esa parte mexicana. Y aunque muchas familias no tienen la misma oportunidad de hacerse ciudadanos estadounidenses, ustedes utilizaron la suya para asegurarse de que pudiéramos regresar

a nuestra tierra materna y apreciar toda la belleza y autenticidad de México. Siempre estaré agradecida por eso.

Sé que no debe ser fácil criar a cuatro niños con seis, ocho y diez años de diferencia, pero ustedes nos dieron todo lo que pudieron. Ahora pueden vivir con la alegría de que sus esfuerzos no fueron en vano al ver a su hija mayor convertirse en la primera en la familia en ir a la universidad, alcanzando una educación que ustedes soñaron tener. Estoy emocionada de caminar

por el escenario para recibir mi diploma y abrir las puertas a oportunidades que ustedes imaginaron cuando tenían mi edad. Espero que puedan verme recibir mi diploma y que se sientan orgullosos de mí y de todos sus esfuerzos. Los amo y espero que podamos seguir adelante en esta nueva etapa de nuestras vidas juntos.

Atentamente,

Su hija.

**Dany Morales Hernández**

## OUR SCHOOL ROUTINE

### **TW: Gun violence**

With the sound of the rocket, the  
stampede roars  
shaking the earth beneath us.  
There is no peace here. We lock fingers but  
there is a lost sense of direction.  
It is the smoke from our terror like our  
breath on windows  
and I feel as if our oxygen is  
being replaced by the sweat climbing onto  
our brows.

We sit in silence, hoping this is a sleeping spell.  
A nightmare dreading daybreak.  
But the roaring continues,  
we keep running.  
I hear the pattering of our feet.  
Now it's just mine.  
You are ripped from me  
like a baby being torn from their  
mother's breast  
and left bleeding tears like the one dripping  
from your gunshots.

Another man down but he is yet a lamb  
without his mother.  
You are a gaping hole of a ghost that  
exists in the corners of my mind.  
As the clouds travel above us in  
their stillness, their silence.  
They wait  
for the world to settle down again,  
drowned by the shock of your shadow

**Julissa Beltran**

## 6E

January 6, 6 de enero

Even Athena perched on the Hill  
watched in disbelief as that colossus  
was breached right under her feet.

February 4, 4 de febrero:

4F

In the name of Bolivar, another democracy  
is put to the test and survives  
“por ahora.”

While judgement is passed  
let us not forget the underlying grievances  
prejudices weaponized by the power hungry  
to fulfill their ambitions.  
Be wary of Janus, god of beginnings  
transitions, ultimately a two-faced deity.

For reckless acts sometimes have a funny way  
of turning “for now” into today.

**Gabo Alvarado-Lieber**

# PLAYA EN EL ATARDECER

FOTOGRAFÍA DIGITAL



**César Brizuela**

## EARTH IS A NURSING ROCK

1  
Language ends with time  
Stories fracture in ripples  
Tongues click, throats flex, voices change  
Faces slip in and out of dreams

2  
My mother was 17 when she gave birth to  
me. Given her young age and 98 lb frame,  
the doctor informed her that she wouldn't  
produce milk yet. She cradled me in her  
arms and stared into my starving eyes as I  
sucked on the nipple of a formula bottle.  
Her dry breasts wept—unable to wring out a  
single tear.

3  
Mother is white—meaning her ancestors  
found sticks and stones and burned them—  
meaning her ancestors found Father's  
ancestors and taught them capitalism—  
meaning I'm the ash covering concrete.

4  
Cerebrum in Latin means brain. In English, it  
only defines the front.

5  
I think about how the truth was slanted  
Before Emily Dickinson. Huītzilōpōchtli  
And Mēztli were gods before  
Prometheus and Edison.

6  
My box, 4 walls of personas,  
dreams of living outside  
with singing canaries.  
What is West on a spinning globe?

7  
My cat is domesticated. She'd die if I didn't  
feed her 3 times a day.  
The formula is unnatural.

8  
I am elements.  
Should I slice my belly to show you?

9  
The universe speaks  
In patterns, eyes play tricks.

10  
A pendulum is only free if someone pushes  
it.

11  
The boy was 8 years old when his mother  
first put a Quetzal-feathered headdress  
on him. They were under the summer  
sun at la pulga—the outdoor swap  
meet—kicking up dirt with their beat up  
sneakers. A bark-skinned boy wearing a  
full traditional outfit walked past and told  
the boy, "You're too white to wear that."  
He was noticeably a few years older than

the boy—11, maybe 12? But the boy didn't  
pay him no mind. He instead looked out  
towards the mesas and watched the distant  
downpours erode the land into its flatness.  
His father was a carpenter, so the boy knew  
enough about tables to ask himself—who do  
the mesas belong to? He thought about how  
his father's customers always accommodated  
for the right amount of people in their family  
when purchasing a table. How whenever  
married couples divorced they would ask  
his father to cut the table into half. How  
the legs were the most essential part of the  
structure. He imagined the distant mesas,  
each with their own set of legs buried below  
the surface. Were they sitting Indian style  
or have they been standing for thousands of  
years?

"Mijo, lift up your arms," his mother  
demanded. Her face was two inches away  
from his and he couldn't help but recognize  
her imperfections. Her left eye was bigger

than the right, or maybe the right was just lazy. Her lips were scarred with small white slashes from what appeared to be from bite marks. Her hair—beautifully—fell below her butt, but it was seasoned with salt and pepper strands that were so even in amount, he couldn't tell which side of life she was on. It was at this moment that he realized he would have to live without her one day. That he would be alone in the world without her.

The boy squirmed in her arms. "Why am I wearing this again, mom?"

"It will make your family very happy. Just keep holding still while I finish putting this on you." Her voice was calming like most mothers would be. The boy obliged to her commands because he understood her pain even when she wouldn't show it. It was clear that she missed his father. The boy could tell by the way she forced him to dress up as a warrior to fill the role. He was tired of playing dress up to make others happy. He wanted to roll around in the dirt and explore rocks in the desert, but here he was, dressing up as a warrior—comforting his mother.

The boy felt a sudden urge rush through his body. "M-o-m...I have to pee. I have to pee really bad," he said, dancing up and down.

"¡Hijo de la chingada! I told you to use the bathroom before I put this on you!"  
"I'm sorry."

She pointed to a prickly pear cactus about 20 yards away from them and told him to use the restroom there and to not wet his clothes. The boy crossed the noisy lane of customers and performers. He didn't realize how noisy it was before he started walking through the swap meet. Running through the crowd he bumped into a group of arguing señoras with plastic bags full of cheap colorful beads and Jesus decorations. He couldn't hear what they were arguing about. He assumed it was about whose grandson was the most handsome. The boy quickly apologized for crashing into one of their large bellies and squeezed past the rest of the passersby.

The cactus was behind a paletero, so after quickly glancing at the delicious ice-cold paletas the boy rushed over to

the cactus. He slightly leaned back and closed his eyes as he watered the plant. When he opened his eyes back up, a small lizard crawled out from underneath one of the nopales and into the sunlight. The boy quickly shook it off and pulled up his bottoms because he didn't want the lizard to jump up and bite his penis. The lizard's scaly-brown skin matched the dirt, but a glowing blue stripe went down its back. The boy stared at it closer. He realized it was glistening and it was his fault. "Oh my god, I'm so sorry. It was an accident," he said to the lizard. The lizard looked up at him and started to do push ups. The boy quickly turned around and asked the paletero if he had water, but they couldn't understand each other—a language barrier—much like the boy and the lizard. He heard his mother yelling at him in the distance, but the lizard was still soaked in his pee, so he picked it up, put it in his pocket and ran back to his mom.

His mother looked down at his soaked pocket. She became visibly frustrated. "I

told you not to get your outfit wet! Are you serious right now?!"

She grabbed a handkerchief from her purse and went to dry the wet spot, but the boy backed up and yelled, "No! You'll kill it, you'll kill it!"

He stuck his hand into his pocket and pulled out the blue-striped lizard. It bobbed its head at the both of them and crawled up the boy's arm to his neck and then to the top of his head where it sat on the front of his Quetzal-feathered headdress.

"I accidentally peed on it," the boy said. His mother pushed aside salt and pepper strands from her face. She looked at the lizard then at the boy. "Did it talk to you?"

"What...no...why?" the boy said.

"Mijo, it's important, did it communicate to you?" Her voice was comforting again.

"Mom, it's just a lizard. They can't talk."

"Every animal communicates one way or the other. If you find yourself lucky enough, they talk to us humans."

"But that doesn't mean they can like talk our words."

She knelt down in front of the boy and grabbed both of his hands. “Even if they choose to talk to us humans, it can be hard to hear because we are not really listening. You have to listen, mijo. Not with your ears, but with your existence.”

“I can’t even speak Spanish, how am I supposed to speak Lizard?”

The boy knew he was smart for his age, so hearing all of this from his mother felt like a betrayal to everything he had learned in school. School for him was a place that he grew to love because he was recognized for his high-functioning brain there. He never mentioned it, but about a year ago, before his parents divorced, he overheard an argument between them. They had always fought, so he wasn’t paying attention like usual, until he heard his name. His father said something about how his mother couldn’t breastfeed the boy when he was a baby—that the formula did something and messed up his brain development. His father said that she wasn’t woman enough and that she was a bad mother. Ever since the boy

overheard that argument he questioned his own existence, but he never talked to his mother about it. He didn’t want to know the truth. The boy looked past his mother and rested his eyes back on the mesas—they called for him with a soft whisper.

The mesas grew larger and larger. The boy watched dark gray clouds appear above him—eliminating the sun from the sky. He felt nauseous. Every particle in his body jolted with a lingering tingle. A hurricane of shadows surrounded him. He wasn’t afraid. Drops of rain comforted him. He forgot everything at that moment.

“Whoa—” the boy said, soaking in the vast mountainside.

He edged towards the bottom where the soft sedimentary rock met the dirt and revealed the layers or in other terms—the years. He felt a loss of control. He looked towards the top and noticed that there was a clear path of notches for him to climb his way to the top. His body started to climb before he could even consent. Each handful of rock where he lifted himself should have

been slippery with the heavy downpour, but his hands and feet stuck to the wall as if he had microscopic hairs, or setae. Why am I... where am I...how did I...? The boy slowly started to come to his senses, but when the rain carried down chunks of sediment with it, he let go of his mind and let his body guide him. None of the falling boulders got close enough to crash into him, but he couldn’t help but tense up inside.

When the boy reached the top, his body flung him onto the mesa and into a fetal position. He felt a sudden fatigue as if someone was carrying his body for him and released it. He untangled himself by standing up and wiggling his fingers with full command again. The rain stopped, but the dark gray clouds remained. The boy looked around to find anything that could be an answer to why he was here. Nothing stood out to him at first, it was all empty ground with no signs of life, but at the edge of his vision he noticed abnormally shaped rocks.

It only took a few minutes to reach the rocks and when he did, he came up

on four rocks that were lined up perfectly next to each other. They were shaped like chairs with small amounts of cacti on each side where the armrests would usually be. He thought it was funny how there were chairs on top of the mesa—a table—and he imagined what his mom would say if he’d put the chairs on top of the dining room table. She’d curse at him and tell him that it is not the way things should be. That he would be living life backwards. The boy scratched his scalp after a breeze blew by and almost took his headdress with it—he was surprised that it was still on his head.

*B-O-Y-Y-Y*, a deep voice echoed.

“Who said that? Where are you?” he scanned around, but didn’t see anyone.

*They brought you here.* The voice sounded closer.

“What’s going on? Please, don’t hurt me.” The boy panicked.

*Little boy in the Indian costume, calm down.*

The boy noticed four small lizards crawl from behind the rocks, where they

each then jumped onto their own rock like it was their throne. The four lizards had a different colored stripe from one another, yellow, red, green, and blue. They individually bobbed their heads at the boy greeting themselves. *We have been referred to by many names, Cuetzpalin, Kan, Lagartija, and thousands of others in ancient languages, but you may refer to us as what your people call us, Lizard.*

None of their mouths moved, but the boy understood them. He locked eyes with the blue-striped lizard sitting in the chair on the farthest right. He remembered what happened at the cactus and said, “I’m here because I peed on you, huh? I’m sorry, it was an accident! I swear!”

The blue-striped lizard clung to the edge of its rock and stuck out its pinkish reptile tongue then retracted it.

*I already accepted your apology, but you didn’t listen to me. I bowed four times to show my respect. Also my dominance.*

“Wait, you mean the push ups?”

The yellow-striped lizard to the left of the blue one scurried around in a few complete circles.

*Boy, listen to us. You are here to understand your purpose in the universe. You connected with the mesas that we now stand on. They whispered to you and brought you to us. Tell me now, little boy in the Indian costume, what do you want to ask the mesas?*

The boy stayed quiet for a few seconds. He gently kicked up dirt around him and searched his mind. The thoughts of when he first stared at the mesas fluttered his mind.

“Mesa, means ‘table’ in Spanish, and every table has legs. Do the mountains have legs? Do they belong to anyone?”

The ground rumbled causing the green-striped lizard to roll on its back and wiggle its four legs in the air.

*Listen boy, ownership is a human thought that you need to forget. The mesas do not have legs like you do and nor are they owned by anything. You can call them tables or mesas or mountains, but truly they*

*don’t have a name. They are existence. And the sooner you humans understand this—the sooner life will become life again.*

Life was the one concept that the boy previously never quite understood. People are born to die and humans have no purpose, he often thought. Maybe he thought this way because of the messed up brain his dad said he had, but after talking to the lizards new sparks flew in his mind.

The boy took off his headdress and held it out in front of him. In this moment, he imagined that the universe spoke in patterns because each hand-stitched thread was woven imperfectly, but still connected materials of four different colors—resembling each of the lizard’s stripes. The headdress was passed down generations on his dad’s side, so that means it was crafted long before he was even alive, yet the pattern still felt like it was meant for his realization in this exact moment. He suddenly felt much smaller in the context of everything.

The lizards awaited his next question and the boy didn’t want them to grow impatient,

so he simply asked, “What’s even the point of dressing up as a warrior and dancing?”

*The ancient dances are rituals that connect you humans to the universe. They are derived from the sacred stories that we told your ancestors. Your ancestors respected the land and the animals, so we chose to share the stories of how we were created. They were much closer to us than you humans are now. It’s a shame the way things are now. It makes us happy whenever dances occur. Do you now understand your place in the universe?*

The boy nodded his head, but quickly turned away from the lizards. He stared into the distance towards his past and his future. Tears swole in his eyes and fell from his cheeks—eventually flattened by the mesa.

“When my mom dies, where will she go?” The boy choked up.

The red-striped lizard zipped over to the boy and stuck its tail in the ground. It mixed his tears with the red dirt—merging the land with human emotion. The lizard jumped onto his right shoulder where it

then smeared the red mud into a horizontal stripe across his face.

*She'll be with us, of course. And you won't be alone. Remember that the land and us animals are always here. Watching. Listening. Comforting.*

From the dark gray clouds above, an eagle swooped down with its talons outstretched and snatched the boy right from the mountaintop. It was so quick that he screamed and kicked his legs, but as he looked up to see what was carrying him he noticed a blue stripe of feathers trailing down the eagle's back. Together they soared away from the mesas and aimed towards the land of people.

The clouds disappeared and the boy's vision of the setting took shape again when the eagle flew down as soon as they approached the swapmeet. Its talons released the boy by the same cactus he had previously peed on and his feet sank into the dirt when he landed. He had never felt more alive.

The eagle perched on the cactus, it rapidly flapped its wings, and transformed into the small lizard it once was. The lizard then bobbed its head once again and crawled under the prickly pear where it had originally come from.

It was gone before the boy could thank it.

"From this day forward, I'll remember to only pee inside of toilets," the boy said, laughing at his own joke.

Coming from a short distance he heard his mother's voice calling for him. The boy knew he needed to get back to her, but something told him that he should make a quick detour. He turned in the direction of the paletero and walked up to him. The man resembled his father with his brown skin, bald head, and intimidating face. The boy wiped the sweat from his forehead and said, "Hola señor, hace calor, great time to sell paletas! So sorry for my bad Spanish."

"No no es good," he gave a thumbs up. "Y eberyday es tha best time. ¿Quieres uno?"

They understood each other.

"I'll come back for one after mi baile performance," the boy said. The man smiled and waved him bye.

The boy pushed through the crowd of noisy pedestrians. His mother was crouched waiting for him with open arms. She thoroughly examined him up and down. "You didn't get wet at all, great job." She commended him. "But how did you finish your outfit?"

"What do you mean?"

"The red stripe across your face. I never told you that the stripe was the final touch to your outfit. How did you...?"

The boy had forgotten all about it. He thought about how to respond to his mom, but nothing came out. He knew that even for a kid, he'd sound crazy for telling her the truth of what happened with the lizards and the mesa. But it was the truth and it only made more sense after he learned that the last part of his outfit was finished by the lizards.

"You know what, don't answer that. I like to believe in things happening for a

reason. Are you ready to go perform? The others are waiting for you to join them," she said, to which he nodded.

Backstage was a strict no parent zone because it would be literal chaos if they all hovered back there. The dancers anxiously waited in a single file line—visibly portraying their stage fright. The choreographer poked her head out from the front of the line and sighed with relief as she watched the boy fall in line. She signaled to everyone that they had four minutes until showtime.

Each dancer represented their family's unique heritage with beautiful traditional outfits. Amongst the vibrant feathers of what seemed like every bird native to the Americas, the boy thought about how the blue-striped lizard turned into an eagle then back to a lizard. What else could it turn into?, he thought. A human? He laughed at this thought because he knew no animal would ever want to be a human. Even humans don't want to be humans.

The bark-skinned boy that made fun of him earlier showed up right before they

started to walk out. The boy noticed his entrance and without hesitation he ran up to the other boy and fell on the ground. Every colorful headdress directed their attention to him, but before anyone could laugh, the boy lifted himself up and down with four push ups.

12



Notes:

The image to the left is a small piece taken from *The Codex Quetzalecatzin*, which is an ancient map of modern-day Mexico. It was created by the indigenous people during the time when Spaniards were claiming land for their own.

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/g4701g.ct009133/?r=-0.945,-0.142,2.891,1.37,0>

13

Earth is a nursing rock.

**Steven Valenzuela**



*The Codex Quetzalecatzin*

**DREAMER**  
**GUADALAJARA, MÉXICO**  
FOTOGRAFÍA DIGITAL



**Roger Camp**

## ADORNANDO LAS CALLES DE MI ALMA

Contemplo el papel picado que se ondula al suave ritmo del viento junto a las hermosas flores de papel que decoran la calle. Hay flores rojas, moradas y amarillas.

Es la fiesta del santo del pueblo y nos preparamos para darle la bienvenida.

Alfombras de aserrín se extienden con diseños emblemáticos, mostrando una precisión e imaginación incomparables.

En el centro, hay una mesa decorada con los manteles más elegantes y los cojines más suaves.

Los hombres preparan los castillos que iluminarán la noche con su belleza pirotécnica.

El señor de Araró viene en camino. Escucho el murmullo colectivo de cientos de personas que se acercan.

Seis hombres cargan la urna mientras la banda que camina detrás de ellos deleita a la multitud con un son que solo una fiesta de pueblo puede invocar.

Avanzan hasta la mesa que se colocó en medio de la calle, donde el señor de Araró podrá reposar

Se detienen por unos momentos mientras las personas rezan y el padre bendice a la familia y su hogar.

Luego, los hombres levantan la urna y continúan su camino, con la banda tras de ellos y los cientos de feligreses siguiéndolos. Mis ojos los siguen hasta que la última persona desaparece al final de la calle.

Vuelvo la mirada a lo que tanto nos costó preparar y noto que todo está fuera de lugar.

La mesa se ha movido un poco y los cojines están aplastados.

Algunos pedazos de papel picado cuelgan rotos, y varias flores han desaparecido. La alfombra de aserrín se ha convertido en una mezcla desordenada de colores y no puedo evitar sentir tristeza.

Mi abuela, que es más sabia, me dice: “Queríamos servir al señor de Araró y así lo hicimos. Vino y se llevó la belleza de lo que con tanto esfuerzo y dedicación preparamos. Cumplimos nuestro propósito.” Con un suspiro, empiezo a recoger.

**Ariana Caballero**

## NEW WORLD

They came from a place called little Venice,  
Small shacks on stilts dotting the coast of a large lake  
Where ships of days past sailed in from the Caribbean Sea  
Guided by a lighthouse, an orb of constant lightning strikes,  
To dock in the land beloved by the sun.

Over the years, a chasm appeared.  
A jagged landscape of shared memories  
Engulfed in a fog their eyes cannot pierce,  
As they rock on either edge of each ridge  
With the shifting winds.

Denial was believing that the gorge could be bridged.  
Acceptance may be surrendering to the fact  
That returning to that same land is a dream.

That their identity too is a mirage,  
A chorus of sand dunes on an isthmus  
Of a united America.

**Gabo Alvarado-Lieber**

## A BLUE-PRINTED CEMETERY

The tattooed face whispers about  
the empty barrel of their soul.  
Painted with the memories of  
the bleeding canyon disturbing  
the symmetry of  
its never-ending pools of water.

Disappearing into the hands of a man-made  
drought.

Sharp tongues swallow the ocean whole.  
Packing their identities with silk-like bows.

Ribbons wrapped around windpipes  
making for the curve of their signature.  
Bound in line with the rows of ribbons  
that float back to that one-bedroom home  
with nostalgic broken tiles.

Oxygen becomes a death sentence as  
it tangles ribbons like ropes.  
Our escape being masked like  
the pearls knotted in their pain.  
Fooling survival for unconditional loyalty.

Stains covering photographs of  
our yesterdays  
as we grow in years instead of weeks,  
a minute mounting our life sentence.  
Hands clawing at the rope exhausted and  
Conditioned to make blood splatter on tiles  
that were fundamentally broken.

Our feet dent them deep as wet concrete.

Our placement drying before  
letting us know we  
could cut the red rope loose.

**Julissa Beltran**

## CAFÉ CON LECHE, MI AMOR

My U shaped kitchen is very efficient. Everything is within arm's reach - my stove to the left, the double sink below the original 1950's single pane glass window that freezes every winter creating icicles inside, and the fridge to the right. Half asleep, on autopilot, I begin the preparation of my morning coffee. It's early. The few birds that remain after their pre-dawn work chorus are still chirping. The hum of early morning traffic of a new day is just beginning. My home is quiet. Children are still sleeping and I am the only one awake. This is my private moment, a solo performance repeated each morning. No audience. No shared stage. I bow only for myself.

I feel my small person gently leaning his head and body weight into the side of my leg. I continue my morning ritual - stirring the coffee grinds into the boiling water in the french press, situating the lid and plunger into the groove of the glass beaker, firmly, yet gently, slowly pushing the plunger down against the boiling water and coffee grinds, blending and creating what I look forward to

each day before my feet even touch the cold wood floor, toes feeling around for slippers after a night's sleep.

I feel my small person's warm breath on my leg, his hands loosely wrapped around my upper leg, his soft curls pressed into my skin. He stands by my side, unaware and unconcerned with what I am doing. Solely seeking comfort in my presence. Filling the void I left when I got out of bed, leaving him with the fading warmth of my pillow, not the consistent heat of my body. Even asleep he knows the difference.

"Mami, why are we not the same color? I want to be the same color like you." He asks breaking the morning silence. His first words of a new day.

"Ohh Pa," I lovingly coo. "You are beautiful just the way you are."

"But why are we different colors?" he persists. His mind always working.

I pause for half a second. "Go get your stool. I wanna show you something."

He drags the two step wooden stool to my side. One my grandmother most likely bought in a thrift shop or pulled from a dumpster, perhaps an Ikea splurge. The counter between sink and fridge has just enough room for our bodies to stand side by side. I pour the black coffee from the french press into one of the many Mommy mugs I have been gifted over the years.

"Bueno m'ijo...look. You see this?" I say gesturing to the black coffee in my Mommy mug. He gives a trusting toddler nod that indicates, *'I have no idea where this is going, but I'm going to follow along.'*

"This right here - that's your father." He looks from the mug of black coffee to my face meeting my eyes, and back to the coffee. He nods his head.

"And you see this?" I say holding the carton of half and half. "This is mami." His eyes dart from the carton to my face, back to the carton, to the black coffee and then again to my face, and our eyes meet again. His eyes search mine, awaiting the explanation he requested and still has not received.

"Now watch closely." I say as I slowly pour the half and half into the coffee. We watch together as the white cream blends smoothly into the black coffee until it becomes a rich pecan brown.

"That's you, pa." I say as our eyes meet once again - his smiling, mine happy with my early morning impromptu mami-genius. "Café con leche, mi amor. Just like you! A little bit of your father and little bit of your mami makes you - you!"

His eyes twinkle with recognition, his lips broaden with a smile of satisfied and delighted joy as he understands something new each day of his young life. "Ohhhh okayyyy." He kisses the large beauty mark on my upper arm as has become his habit, telling me often it looks like a Hershey Kiss. He climbs down the wooden stool, drags it back to its place, and walks away to begin his day.

**Isabella Moreno**

## SPICE OF LIFE

Last year, my father gifted us two types of exotic ajíes along with your more run-of-the-mill Fresno pepper plant: Ají Peruano from, well, Perú and ají dulce from Venezuela, where I was born.

The ajíes in time grew tall by a few feet, produced an abundance of fruit that was earthy, spicy, and sweet. Some of the best tasting salsa my mamá makes with those ajíes.

The Fresno also grew but horizontally, crawling like an ivy. It was the first to bear fruit actually, but the taste in comparison was just plain fiery.

When winter's gloom came, the ajíes and the stunted Fresno moved inside and brightened up our home together for a time, until a plague of scale bugs claimed the ajíes' lives.

Those pesky beasts left the Fresno be but it eventually developed droopy leaves. I was convinced that soon it would pass away, but I was left with egg on my face.

Fredo (I figured he needed a name) is still with us to this day, and whenever that gloom sets in, seasonal or not, I look over at him and remember to appreciate the simpler things in life.

**Gabo Alvarado-Lieber**

## EL AMOR NUNCA MUERE

Hablando en el teléfono con mi mami, ella me dice, "Ay Mija si me vieran en casa, dirían que estoy un poquito loca porque hablo con tu papá todos los días."

Le digo que no está loca y que yo también hablo con el cuando lo extraño, y pues, lo extraño todos los días.

El amor no muere con la muerte. El amor no se termina con lo terrestre. El amor trasciende los finales carnales y continúa en los cosmos.

A nuestros queridos no paramos de querer. Caminamos con los recuerdos de nuestros descendientes, contando sus historias, creando memorias con sus memorias.

El amor en nuestros corazones sigue palpitando en las vidas que amamos. Cantamos y celebramos que el amor no muere con la muerte pero vive una eternidad.

**Leslie Mendoza**

## ALEBRIJES DE SMITHER PARK

Gulfgate es un barrio latino en Houston, Texas.  
En Gulfgate, *Munger street* número 2441  
hay un parque llamado Smither Park  
hecho de todo tipo de mosaicos  
En los muros, sobre el suelo, mosaicos en forma  
de peces gigantes, de catrinas y catrines,  
de ranas,  
lagartijas y árboles hechos de conchas de mar y  
rostros que se completan con cristales  
cuarteados.

Hay un espacio, entre los muros,  
donde la luz se desliza en cascada  
y qué coincidencia tan grande que esa cascada  
haya desembocado en ti

Justo ahí, en ese momento,  
se refleja en tu mejilla el trozo de un  
plato adosado en uno de los muros,  
se lee: «Recuerdo de Veracruz».

No me hablen de tiempo  
ni de arquitectura ni de arte  
no quiero saber de los colores de temporada  
mucho menos de lo minimalista  
quiero saber de este CAOS  
de los pedazos de todo que temían ser nada.

Ha nacido un lugar tan vivo que la respiración  
de sus trozos hacen bailar a la cuadra entera  
al sazón de la bamba del migrante.

Recuerdo de Veracruz  
tazas rotas  
sombrecitos  
zorros tocando el banjo  
ángeles hechos de tazas para café  
fotografías de Elvis  
piezas de Dominó en forma de escalera  
Tú.  
El agua sólida  
los peces en las paredes  
la cabeza del dragón  
los tentáculos de la mujer rubia  
el catrín

árbol con hojas de botellas  
los espejos  
y tú.

Voy a ser franca:  
No necesito escribir más de ti,  
no es necesario explicarte una vez más  
todas las razones por las cuales ahora,  
para escribir tu nombre no lo hago,  
simplemente rompo un cristal.

Que si tus paredes se derrumban tomaré  
los pedazos y  
aprenderemos a vivir entre mosaicos.  
Levantaremos murales sobre las banquetas  
de los barrios latinos de Texas.

Vamos a contar historias que desbordan  
de las grietas doradas,  
y cuando nos pidan que hablemos del  
otro, los cristales  
se desprenderán del hogar para dar vida  
a un par de alebrijes  
con alas de vidrio soplado y torsos de cerámica  
que se abrirán

paso entre las paredes de toda la ciudad,  
entre los jardines, las alcantarillas y  
junto a las banquetas.

Porque somos alebrijes y te respiro así,  
con el rostro de un caimán hambriento  
y el cuello  
de un venado marrón con el pecho  
de un águila  
que le teme —como tú— a desgarrar  
mi plumaje.

Yo soy el colibrí; tengo escamas fluorescentes  
en los muslos y no sé qué bestia me ha dado  
esta garganta pero si de ella depende que  
nunca olvides  
estas paredes a la orilla de la banqueta,  
en medio de este barrio latino,  
esta banqueta en medio de Texas,  
estas paredes,  
estas alas,  
las sombras eléctricas en los jardines traseros de  
las casas,

si de esta garganta depende que no olvides  
cómo crujen los cristales cuando agitas tus  
alas para darme sombra y, sobre todo, que  
no  
olvides el azúcar de mi pelaje  
cuando aterrizamos de nuevo aquí,  
en este pedazo de vida,

si de esta garganta depende,  
quiero tener la de un león  
la de un lobo  
o mejor la de una hiena,  
una garganta con las cuerdas  
de una guacamaya  
que aprenderá de ti a no olvidar  
el tamaño de tus alas de dragón,  
tus ojos de león  
tus pedazos y mis pedazos,  
este pedazo que es nuestro  
este mosaico, que somos.

Si tú rindes todos y cada uno de tus pedazos  
frente a mí,  
voy a besar la punta de tu catastrofismo,  
la llamaremos una obra en proceso,  
y dime, halcón,  
qué obra conoces que se haya detenido  
por otra cosa que no sea la muerte de su  
artista.

Voy a aborrecer cualquier final que nos  
propongan que no sea este,  
aquí en este parque.

No tendrá que perecer con nuestros cuerpos.  
No existe atadura entre las palabras,  
el viento y las plumas; así han crecido  
simultáneas  
en las laderas, encimadas sobre las ciudades  
con *smog* que ensucian sus estelas,  
pero siguen, viajan y mueren:

después mueren.

Pero como ellos, nosotros no.  
Como ellos nosotros no porque  
hay un árbol de cuerpo torcido bajo el  
cemento  
y ha crecido, se abrió paso para venir a  
convencernos hoy  
de no tratar de enderezar erróneamente  
ningún camino.  
Ningún pasaje.

No hace falta. No hace falta.

Cuando se nos acabe el ruido, romperemos  
unos platos  
y haremos de ellos otra historia en ese  
mismo muro.

Quizás de esas rupturas nazca un oso.  
Un hurón.  
Un tigre.  
Quién dice que no saldrá de ese desastre un  
ave  
y sabremos por fin, cuando migre, lo que es  
dejar un trozo tuyo  
y vivir en alguien más. En algún lado,  
en algún muro.  
Quizás aquí, en *Smither Park*.

**Sandra Sofía Smithers**

## SAW-CHEE

My first day in American school did not go well. During attendance Mrs. Smith gazed through her thick horn rims at my name for a long time.

“Alright grade two, let’s welcome our new student... Koocheeta.”

The other kids giggled.

“Es Saw-chi-tl,” I said.

“Essawchee?”

“No, es, er, it es Saw-chi-tal.”

“Essawcheet?”

“No, no... Saw-chi-tal.”

By now the kids could barely contain themselves. Mrs. Smith ignored them and tried again. Somehow she got worse each time.



When I got home, Mum was on the couch.

“Mama, why did you call me Xochitl?”

I asked in Spanish.

“Huh?”

“Why did you call me Xochitl?”

Why not Maria, or something like that?”

Mum shrugged and put her phone down.

“Dunno, guess we thought it sounded nice.”

“What does it mean?”

“Dunno. It’s just a name.”

“But it’s my name and I want to know.”

“Ugh, Xochitl, I don’t know why we named you that. Look, can we talk about this later?”

But every kid knows that “later” is just grown-up talk for “never”.



The closest anyone in Montana got to my name was *Saw-Chee*. Everybody else had names like John, and Ashley, and Bob. They talked about dance lessons and hockey games, piano recitals, airparks, and going to “the cabin”. But I never did anything interesting.

Mum worked six days a week cleaning houses and Dad did construction, so he was always tired. The only place Mum ever took me was St. Mary’s, but no one from school went there.

One Monday Mrs. Smith asked everyone what they had done over the weekend.

“Saw-Chee, what did you do?”

“I... I... do *nothing!*”

“Come on now, you must have done *something!*”

“No, no, on the end of the week I stop existing. I disappear!” I yanked my oversized hoodie over my head and hid under my desk.



That summer Dad got a job in Oregon and we had to move.

On the first day of grade three, Ms. Cooper read the attendance. When she got to me she paused, “Um... Ksauchet? Ksauchet García?”

“Saw-Chee, it’s called Saw-Chee.”

“What an interesting name. Does it mean anything?”

I was stunned. No one in America had ever asked about my name.

“Is a god of Mexico. She is muy powerful!” I was shocked. Where had that come from?

“That’s so interesting,” said Ms. Cooper.

“I can’t wait to hear more about her!”



At lunch-recess the girls invited me to play with them. They showed me their “fort” behind a half dead bush in the corner of the schoolyard. We played *Imagination* and each of the girls took an *Imagination* name. Janice was Ariel, Sandra was Belle, Ellen was Anastasia.

“What name d’you want?” asked Sandra-Belle.

“She’ll be Saw-Chee, of course,” interrupted Ellen-Anastasia.

“What movie’s she from?” asked Janice-Ariel.

“She is a goddess. She is super powerful,” I said.

“What does she do?”

“Um, well, uh, she is muy, eh, very beautiful. She is queen of Mountain Kingdom. She one time kills a total army with a magic sword.”

The other girls stared at me.

“Your name is so cool!”

“I wish my name were interesting like yours.”

“Yeah, you don’t need to change it for *Imagination!*”

Soon Saw-Chee appeared on the pages of my school journal. She became a fixture in all the *Imagination* games I played. I dressed up as her for Halloween, and she became a by-word in the classroom. Everyone wanted to hear more about Saw-Chee. Mum even had a shirt printed for my birthday with *Saw-Chee* on it.



That summer, the family scraped together enough money to send Mum and me to Mexico to see family. The day after we arrived Tio Ricardo threw a fiesta. After the tearful pandemonium of reunions and dinner the adults shooed the kids outside. The boys played basketball while Lupita and I sat in the corner and chatted.

“How come everyone calls you *Saw-Chee*?” she asked.

I opened my mouth, hesitated, and said, “It’s the name of an American heroine. She’s super powerful.”

**Erik Peters**

## A LA MUJER EN MI PIEL

If you ever desired to draw ever sat on a folding stool facing the mural on 22nd and Ellsworth had looks over your shoulder, preguntas and the eerie conformation that they open arms to art and fear it black outline black background too many colors looks like graffiti seems spiritual ever called crazy as you stand to pace in front of a bus if you paid too much for a salary too little for ripped jeans had your name forgotten before you said it swam the river harder because of it snickered at for a shaved head used the hair to cushion the stool trace your way from tense in every sinew to starting to feel safe you’re doing something right, okay?

**Daniel Barry**

**COCA-COLA (1) - IN CEMENTO VERITAS**  
CONCRETE AND ENAMEL, 30CM X 30CM



**Mario Loprete**

**COCA-COLA (2) - IN CEMENTO VERITAS**  
CONCRETE AND ENAMEL, 30CM X 30CM



**Mario Loprete**

## ALGUNAS PREGUNTAS DE QUIEN TRABAJA EN CASA

*A partir de Bertolt Brecht*

La ropa limpia, ¿se limpió ella sola?  
La comida caliente, ¿se preparó ella misma?  
El polvo del piso, ¿se fue por cuenta propia?  
Y estas preguntas, ¿quién me las responde?  
¿Acaso también se responden solas?

**Rubén Flores**

## UN INSTANTE

Quisiera poder pintar el cuadro de un instante fijando, por siempre, lo único; lo inconstante.

Tiempo:  
palabra vacía de instantes llena.

Presente:  
infinita brevedad del ahora.

Creí captarte en mi Polaroid.

Aire fuiste,  
anhelo.

**Santiago de Rábago-León**

*agosto, 2024*

## HÉROES

Atardecía y el sol lanzaba guiños ladeados a través de las nubes que los cristales polarizados tamizaban y convertían en un espectáculo de luz esquivada.

La mujer apartó la vista indiferente a lo que había más allá del cristal. En realidad, había estado concentrada en el reflejo que iba y venía conforme bailaba la luminiscencia del exterior: el reflejo de una extraña que devolvía su mirada escudriñadora, una desconocida que no era otra que ella por mucho que le pesara... Y le pesaba.

Se volvió hacia el interior de la vasta sala de espera en busca del reloj que colgaba del techo. Frunció el ceño intentando descifrar la hora a partir de la posición de las grandes saetas. Recordó que debía ignorar la más rápida de las tres, los segundos no cuentan. De las otras dos, una señalaba la hora. Observó la esfera con gesto dubitativo. ¿Cuál? Sí, eso era: la más corta. Y la larga indicaba los minutos. ¿O era al revés? Hizo un gesto impaciente añorando su unidad portátil de IA que le facilitaba cualquier dato con sólo pensarlo. Siempre se la retiraban antes de los encuentros.

«Los detalles son importantes, hasta el más mínimo» le decían siempre. «Nada de IAs por integradas que estén, arruinarían la puesta en escena si ellos las detectasen. No podemos correr riesgos, hay demasiado en juego».

Meneó la cabeza. ¿Qué más daba? No podía faltar mucho para el aterrizaje, entonces las horas volarían hasta la despedida. Los encuentros apenas duraban un día. No es que el tiempo estuviera establecido de antemano, sucedía que ninguna de las partes deseaba prolongarlo; hacerlo era igual que contemplar un truco de ilusionismo demasiadas veces y de cerca: la magia acaba por convertirse en un hábil juego de dedos y distracción...  
...Hábil y decepcionante.

Tomó asiento en una de las butacas grises repartidas por la sala y se masajeó las sienes con movimientos lentos, circulares. Tenía que relajarse. Inspiró con fuerza y fijó la mirada azul en las mesas sobre las que se esparcían periódicos con fotos a todo color. Estaban hechos de papel auténtico. Alargó la mano para acariciarlos con suavidad, como hacía siempre. El tacto era extraño, agradable y reconfortante. Había que volver

las hojas con las manos y las imágenes que ilustraban las noticias eran fijas, estáticas e hipnóticas de una forma extraña. En las portadas de los diarios, diseminados con calculado desorden, aparecía la misma imagen: la de un rostro enjuto de pómulos prominentes y mirada perspicaz. Los ojos eran castaños e inteligentes y repletos de entusiasmo. Demasiado, quizá. Bajo la foto, una leyenda que rezaba lo mismo de siempre, lo de todos los encuentros:

*¡VUELVE EL HÉROE!*

Y, a continuación, arrancaba el artículo donde se ensalzaba la labor del “héroe”.

*Tras cumplir el primer año de su misión, el comandante Santos vuelve a la Tierra para reunirse con los suyos.*

No siguió leyendo, se sabía de memoria el artículo, idéntico al de cada encuentro en el que sólo variaba el nombre del homenajead y algunos datos personales. Lo que nunca cambiaba eran las mentiras. La primera era la fecha que encabezaba cada diario.

«Inexactitudes, no mentiras» le decían. «Ajustes necesarios con los que todos salimos ganando».

Ella no estaba de acuerdo, una mentira es siempre una mentira, aunque se lo guardaba al recapacitar que ella era el mayor de los engaños.

Procuró mantener a raya el creciente nerviosismo que mariposeaba en su interior. Llevaba unas cuantas citas a la espalda y ya debería estar acostumbrada, pero el desasosiego era un compañero que no le fallaba cuando el encuentro era inminente. De pronto, se incorporó y echó a andar con decisión en dirección al bar que había en el centro exacto del rectángulo que formaba la sala de espera. Los tacones repiquetearon inseguros sobre las baldosas blancas de la inmensa estancia levantando ecos mientras ella maldecía el calzado.

Al otro lado de la barra, Mel, el segundo de los dos ocupantes de la gran estancia, la observó con una sonrisa que bailaba entre la admiración y la contrariedad. También era un veterano de los encuentros y conocía de sobra los demonios que acosaban a la chica.

Ella llegó hasta él y se dejó caer con un suspiro sobre un taburete de los que coreaban la barra semicircular.

—Estos zapatos me están matando —gruñó, apartando la larga melena castaña del rostro—.

No puedo creer que las mujeres usaran algo así a diario, debían de acabar con los pies destrozados.

—¿Nerviosa? Vamos, cielo, no es tu primera cita.

—Quiero un trago —masculló ella, ignorando el comentario—. Bourbon sin hielo.

—Sabes que no deberías —la reconvino con suavidad—. Si estoy aquí es por ellos, para añadir realismo a la escena...

—No te he pedido consejo, pon el bourbon y cierra el pico, Mel. Joder, lo necesito —añadió en tono más suave—. Sólo algo que me haga olvidar estos malditos tacones. —Río sin ganas.

Él se encogió de hombros, se volvió hacia el estante que tenía detrás y tomó una botella llena de un líquido ambarino: Southern Comfort rezaba la etiqueta. Sirvió una dosis en un vaso ancho y chato que ella vació de un trago. Chasqueó la lengua y resopló antes de golpear el vaso sobre la barra.

—Otro.

Mel abrió la boca para cerrarla de inmediato. Le puso otro trago que siguió el camino del primero con idéntico ritual. Cuando el vaso golpeó de nuevo la barra y repiqueteó impaciente sobre la formica disfrazada de roble, el barman colocó la botella en su sitio negando con la cabeza.

—No te serviré otro, cielo —dijo con firmeza—. Te pongas como te pongas.

Por unos instantes, él temió que ella le arrojaría el vaso a la cabeza, pero tras una

mirada fulminante, la chica hundió la cara entre las manos. Los sollozos la hicieron temblar.

—¿Se puede saber qué te ocurre, cielo?

Ella levantó la cabeza, tenía las mejillas surcadas de lágrimas y restos de maquillaje.

—Maldita sea, Mel, cada vez lo llevo peor. Me siento... —Se secó las lágrimas con las palmas de las manos mientras intentaba encontrar la expresión exacta—: Sucia; me siento sucia vendiéndome así.

—Vamos, vamos, si no fuera por ti y tus compañeras, ¿qué sería de ellos? Los necesitamos, cielo. ¿Tengo que recordarte la importancia que tiene todo este asunto? Sabes muy bien de dónde vienen, lo que hacen, no creo que sea mucho pedir ofrecerles algo de compañía a su vuelta.

—Lo sé, lo sé —contestó ella—. Viajan a años luz, al borde del universo para mantener la estabilidad de las supercuerdas esas de los cojones. Evitan el *Big Rip* y qué sé yo qué más. En resumen: impiden que nuestra realidad se deshaga por las costuras.

Mel no pudo simular una sonrisa.

—Creo que es la mejor explicación que he oído jamás.

—Mi padre me lo explicaba así cuando era una niña. —Aclaró ella y soltó una pequeña carcajada llena de nostalgia—. ¿Hay alguien que no sepa lo que hacen? ¡Son

héroes, semidioses, seres legendarios! Pero son reales, oh sí, muy reales. Y no creo que esté bien engañarlos Soy una farsante que se viste y maquilla para dar unas horas de placer a esos desgraciados antes de que vuelvan de nuevo al espacio, para que nosotros podamos seguir con nuestras vidas.

Mel se inclinó por encima de la barra y la cogió por los hombros con suavidad.

—Cielo, ¿cómo puedes llamarlos desgraciados? Son los salvadores de la humanidad, del universo entero. Lo han sacrificado todo y hay que tener mucho coraje para hacer algo así.

Ella negó con la cabeza.  
—No es verdad. No sabían lo que sacrificaban. Les hicieron creer que cuando volvieran a la Tierra todo seguiría igual, que sus naves llevaban un compensador que les permite eludir la ley de la relatividad... Mentira.

—No lo es —replicó Mel—, el compensador es real, no permite que se desajuste el tiempo; no del todo, al menos.

—Sí, en lugar de miles de años, sólo transcurre algún siglo que otro —asintió ella con un deje de cinismo—. Nada importante, sólo que del mundo de sus recuerdos no queda nada. Y lo saben. ¡Sí, lo saben! No me mires así. Tú no estás con ellos, no ves la desesperación en sus ojos.

—Sabes que darán con la solución definitiva, dicen que pronto no será necesario que vuelvan al espacio. —Mel vaciló unos instantes—. Entonces podrán quedarse, disfrutar de sus vidas.

—¿Qué vidas? —acometió ella con ferocidad—. Se dejan engañar porque no les queda otra. Todo esto. —Abrió los brazos abarcando la sala vacía a excepción de ellos dos—. Todo esto no los engaña ni por un instante, aunque no lo admitirán jamás. ¿Tienes idea de lo que ocurriría si reconocieran que hace cientos de años todo lo que dejaron atrás se ha desvanecido? No creo que quisieran seguir viviendo. No son héroes, son seres humanos que buscan lo que buscamos todos: un hogar al que volver,

los brazos de aquellos a quien amamos para cobijarnos en ellos. Y es justo lo que no tendrán nunca más.

En ese momento un rugido hizo temblar las cristaleras y de entre las nubes surgió una llamarada que les obligó a apartar la mirada.

—Ya está aquí —musitó ella arreglándose el maquillaje con un pequeño neceser que sacó de su bolso. Se atusó el pelo y, tras ponerse de pie, alisó la falda. Se volvió hacia el de la barra—. Me tengo que ir. ¿Cómo estoy?

—Preciosa —dijo Mel pensando que los restos de lágrimas darían más fuerza al encuentro—. ¿Quién eres hoy, cielo?

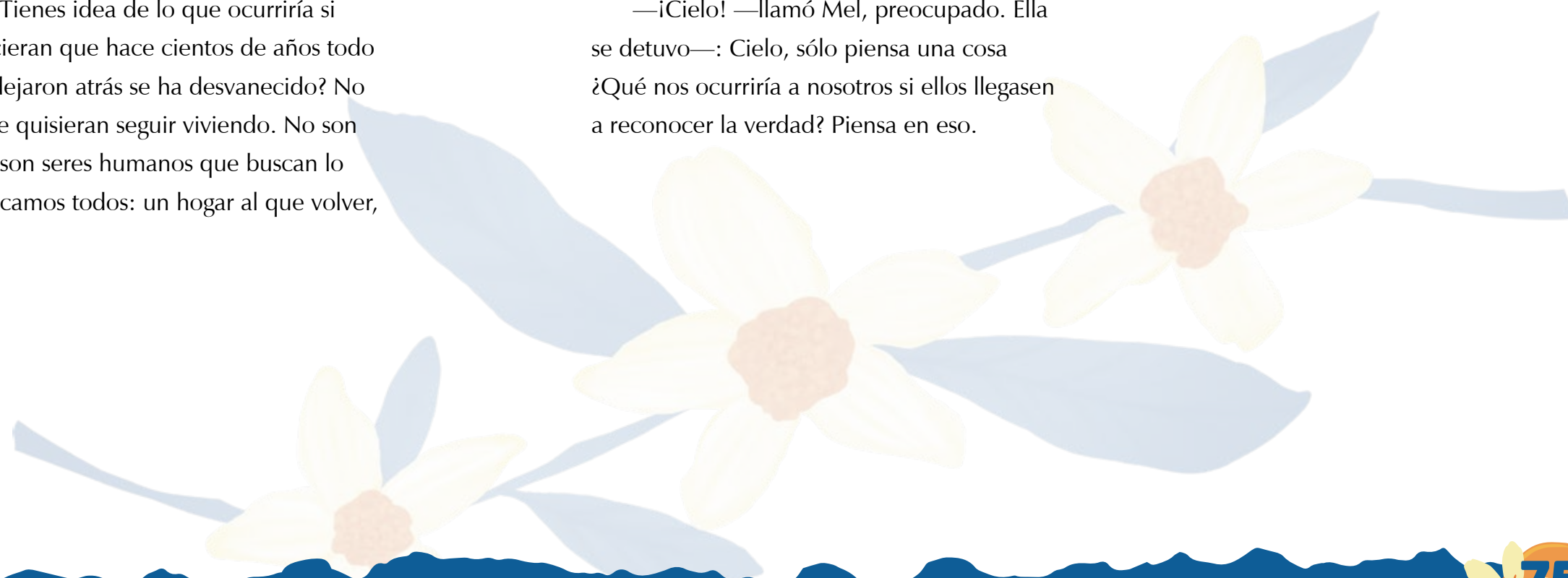
—Eva, la esposa del comandante Santos, que... —La frase se deshilachó en un temblor. Echó a andar a paso rápido.

—¡Cielo! —llamó Mel, preocupado. Ella se detuvo—: Cielo, sólo piensa una cosa ¿Qué nos ocurriría a nosotros si ellos llegasen a reconocer la verdad? Piensa en eso.

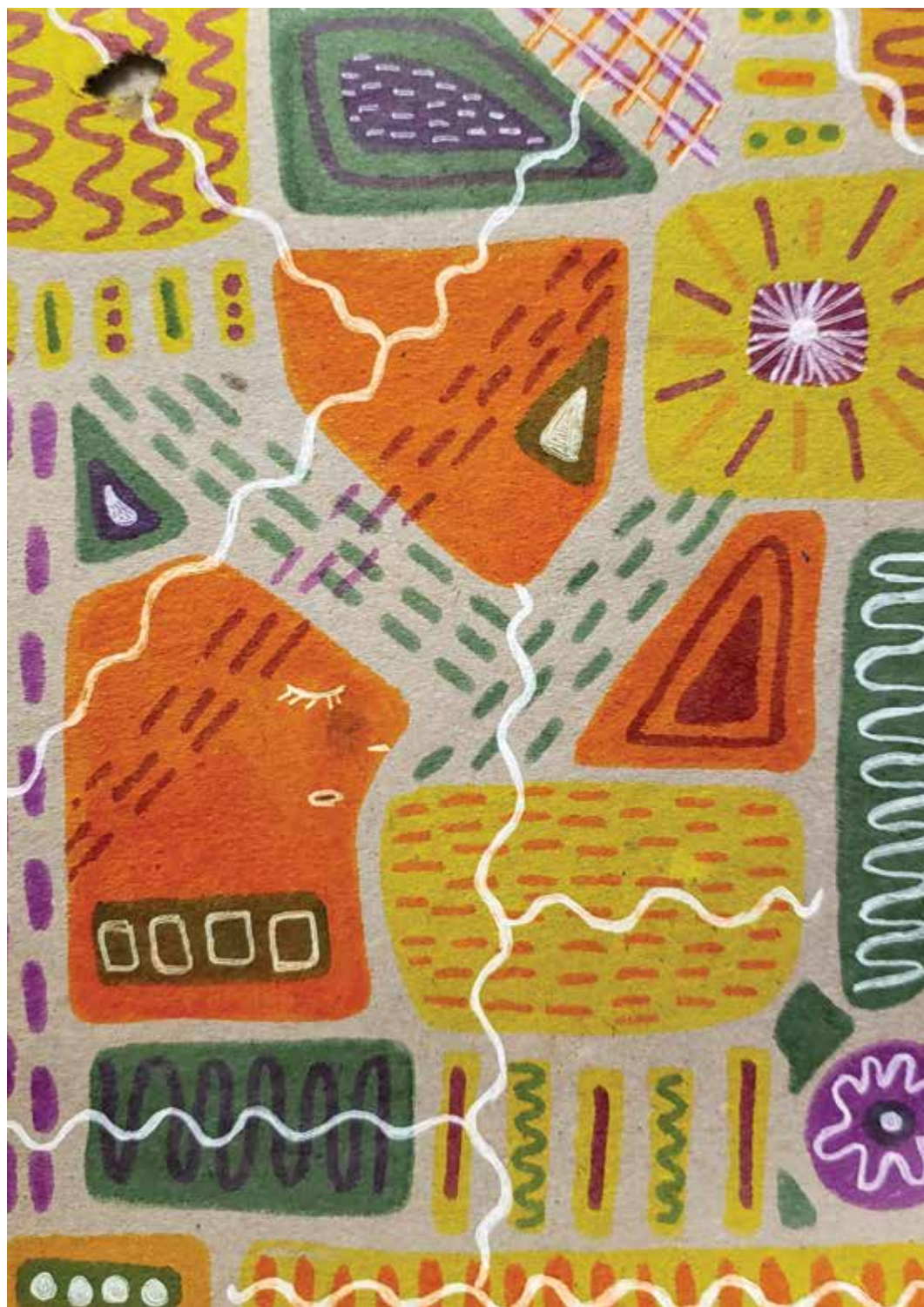
La mujer asintió, sin volverse. Luego compuso una sonrisa forzada y echó a correr hacia la figura que entraba vacilante por el portón de acceso a la sala de espera.

—Eva —llamó el recién llegado y corrió hacia los brazos abiertos de ella—. Tenía miedo de que no estuvieras aquí.

**J.E. Alamo**



## SCLERAZYGOTE



Angelica Esquivel

## ROMANCE DE LOS OLIVOS

Un olivar me llamaba  
con la voz de tu Destino.  
Hacía calor, y el sol  
derretía mi camino.  
La luz pronto se escondió  
por detrás de los olivos;  
el campo no sospechaba  
de mi fulgor asesino.  
Yo nunca quise matarla,  
se me cayó por los riscos,  
en una triste mañana  
de triste color cetrino.  
Quise cambiar el pasado,  
salvar tu cuerpo del limbo,  
mas tu materia es rehén  
de la tierra y los olivos.  
Quise rescatarte entera  
de la senda del olvido;  
ojalá empezar de nuevo  
y acabar por el principio.

Santiago de Rábago León

## LA SELVA

En la selva me resguardo  
en la selva no hay espacios donde no quepa  
completa no hay que sumir la panza  
en la selva.

En la selva las hormigas me dan de comer  
y me visten las hojas verdes, me pintan  
las flores azuladas, me protegen las de  
puntas filosas  
con espinas, esas que me sacian la sed.

En la selva no hay que hacerse chiquita,  
se puede ser gigante, redonda, redondita.  
Acá no hay espacio para reclamos  
insensatos,  
nadie que reclame el peso mío como  
si lo trajeran en las espaldas en lugar de en  
sus ojos ciegos.

Allá me encogen las puertas de las casas,  
no soy bienvenida porque dicen que mis  
muchas pieles no son bellas, porque no  
cabén en las habitaciones, porque mi cadera  
no se hace agua en la boca.

Según ellos soy sólo un costal pesado,  
cómo no voy a pesar de más,  
si traigo cargando todas sus creencias de  
mierda.

Las traigo en el vientre inflado y las  
piernas gordas.

En la cara que también es redonda.

Se me pegan al músculo esas creencias  
aburridas

y las cargo sobre mi pielecita dolida.

Pero no saben que estos murales los tengo  
para aguantar aldeas enteras sobre los  
hombros, soy una

giganta a la que no se le olvida su parte  
humana

porque al parirla, ella se lo dio todo.

Y es verdad que a esta piel ya le pusieron  
precio,

pero en la selva no hay lugar para sus

injustas

vendimias. Aquí los sueños son así, pa'  
todas.

Luego me dicen que prometieron mi tierra,  
pero yo no soy la tierra prometida,  
yo no cumplo promesas,  
yo empiezo revoluciones.

Así soy y seré gracias a solo ellas  
que me han hecho cruzar los ríos para  
aprender a dormir sola,  
en armonía con las montañas,  
que son preciosas.

Y mis uñas están sucísimas de tierra,  
porque a mí  
me quisieron arrebatar mi mundo y  
me agarré con uñas y dientes para no  
olvidarme.

Los miedos que antes me devoré  
voy a untármelos en lodo para que  
no se les olvide de quien es esta tierra  
mojada.

Es mía, la selva es mía.

Los ríos son míos, es mi agua,  
con la que me bañé,  
la que me ha visto nacer desde siempre,  
el agua que seré cuando deje de ser cuerpo,  
pero siga siendo mujer.



**Sandra Sofía Smithers**

## VIAJE DE SANGRE

Voy a librar-te  
mi salvador de flores.  
Rosado está tu rostro,  
que al fin de noche  
Parece seco.

Sigo a las vistas,  
la paloma esperanza  
vuela en el cielo dulce  
que a miel parece.  
¡Cuidame Venus!

Llego a la costa  
de lomo colorado.  
Oro el rezo obsidiana,  
mi pecho al suelo  
por ti lagrimea.



Tomo la flor  
y llega hasta mi vientre y  
madura, y el bebe crece.  
Doy su buena luz.  
Fruta en las manos  
del bebecito  
que tiene tus ojitos.  
En su grito te veo,  
su rostro es tuyo.  
¡Que sacrificio!

La muerte y sombra  
fue un regalo útil.  
Me ha librado de la cárcel,  
pero lo dejo  
atrás en el mar

Mi Corazón,  
anda y sígueme de nuevo.  
La via está recogida.  
Vamos andando  
con la semilla.

**Evan McClellan**

## LA DESPEDIDA ARTE DIGITAL



**Evan McClellan**

## ABUELITA'S CARDS

I stare and stare at the three-card spread. I stare so long, I swear those multi-colored figures step out of their Tarot card squares and start dancing and laughing at me. Did I really think I could do this on my own?

The last time I'd read the cards Abuelita and I had huddled together in her cheery little kitchen in Mexico. My family had left to visit distant relatives in the countryside. "And school?" She asked, smacking cards across the table. Her eyes dance across the spread and she bursts into a smile. Flicking my nose with her calloused finger, she chides me. "Melissa, Melissa, you're going to have so many paths open to you soon, but be careful with the distractions. They cloud your judgment." She knew about my crush in Physics. Embarrassed, but happy, I leap into her arms.

She seemed so strong then.

I press my hands together, looking up at my copy of her funeral photo. I meet her

galaxy-colored eyes. "Abuelita, if you're there. Will you please join me in this reading. I'm so lost. I don't know how to do this without you."

Nothing.

It was a stupid intention anyway. I just wanted some advice. High school graduation was six months away and early decisions had arrived. I wanted to go to St. Edward's, a liberal arts school in Austin. It was a limestone castle with red-tiled roofs and a red oak door. It was only three hours away, and I'd gotten a hefty financial aid package.

When I got the letter, I rushed to my dad with the news. I'd even warmed up dinner, ready to show him the letter. I ran through each scholarship award line by line, totalling the zeros. The grin I'd proudly carried faded into a frown when he didn't say much except, "So, how much will it be?" I try to explain how it isn't that much, how my financial aid covers the majority.

"\$2,000," I sigh. He briefly perks up like the house plants when I remembered to water them. "A year?"

"No, a semester." He wilts.

I bring up the relative cost and the school's benefits. And that's when watery droplets form at the corners of his wrinkled almond eyes. "*Es demasiado hija,*" he whispers, trying to hide the merciless salt stream trickling down his brown leathered skin.

I'm glad he cries because it stifles the screams. The raging questions. The growling suspicions. *Too much?* How could my education be too much when he'd, somehow, been able to trade car after shiny car. Or come home with countless small buys, he got on sale. How could my education be *too much?*

"Why don't you just study here? Lourdes' kids are going to community college. You could be a nurse." He says, wiping his tears and smiles tentatively.

The screams were back again. They wanted to claw eyes, hearts, anything soft. So, I turned to my Dad and said, "Yeah, that's an option."

*That's an option in hell.* I scrawled into my notebook. Next to all the other mean and selfish thoughts I harbored like bats in a cave. Like how I'd actually wanted to go to a school up North that promised travel, study-abroad, and snow-covered dorms.

Everything was falling apart. I strike my nails across my skin. I just need to find the bright spot where all of it was okay. Where the 3 a.m. homework sessions, and 7 p.m. school pickups, and five extracurriculars, and four years of honors classes had all been worth it.

To go to the community college down the street. To be a nurse.

Torn, I slide my hands across the wooden bookshelf Dad built me. It's the length of

my room. The weight of my textbooks and encyclopedias had crushed its predecessor. This had been a problem Dad could solve.

Just not this one. My hands, now claws, ravage my stacked notebooks. Shelf after shelf of books tumble out, sounding like thunderous applause. My secret space is revealed. A gray box with a bold Eiffel tower. Clutching it to my chest, I fly to my bed. Slicing its center, I let its innards spew out. Magazine cut-outs of distant places, cherished mementos and shiny college pamphlets flutter out.

I float my fingers across each glossy image until I'm water. A stream, flowing in and over each college campus, I'm in New York, studying to be a playwright. I'm in Washington D.C., heading to my poli-sci internship. I'm in France, my practiced French finally falling on native ears. Like water, I was everywhere at once.

I could have stayed there longer, floating in my stream of dreams, disappointment pooling at the farthest edges. But, my elbow crunched over something soft, yet resistant. There, the deck of cards slithering out into an S.

I scrambled to my knees, gripping the magical cards. The last thing I had that she'd held.

Containing the question in my head, the memory of her words in my ears, and the distant practice in my hands, I shuffled the deck. The black cards with golden scrolls glinting under my dim amber bulb. My path. My destination. My next step.

When the light stops dancing over the cards, I take a deep breath and pull the final card. Advice from the Universe.

I pause to touch the final card and marvel at its beauty. It's light. It's tenderness.

Is this from you Abuelita? I close my eyes.

My hand wraps around her tough mesquite-bark hand, and we ascend up the ancient limestone steps and into the red oak door. Amazed, I turn back one last time to look out past the Austin city skyline. Then, my eyes meet Abuelita's again.

**Veronica Puente**



## FUNERALS

It's not unusual to attend funerals and *novenarios* for people I don't know; today's mass is for the mother of one of my son's classmates. In this town, roots run deep; crowds crammed under the broad beams of the *Templo de Santa Cecilia* and overflowing across the patio of the church and into the street and to the plaza just beyond. Fortunately for us latecomers outside, the heat is offset by a whispery breeze. We sip the shade under the bougainvilleas and *ceibas*; flowers of purples and reds and pinks, bright and alive. The sun comes and goes behind clouds, echoing back both comfort and discomfort, sort of like life, I suppose. I remember it was also sunny the day we buried my father. As if the weather didn't understand that funerals should be rainy and depressed. Like my son's classmate, once I too was ten years old, attending a funeral packed to overflowing with people I didn't know. I remember stillness, the smell of the flowers, the weight of losing a parent not yet pummelling me to the ground.

The uniformed secondary school kids on the patio are quiet; suffer a quick glance at their phones with the same amount of respect and

indifference that you'd expect at any mass. But we're all quiet, even other mothers and children and neighbours who keep on arriving; everyone in their own time. The weatherworn banner advertising catechism classes hangs on the gate, bleached and sun-beaten.

Outside we can hear nothing of the homily. There's only the sound of demolition crews hammering concrete in the nearby government office. The dogs barking. Everywhere, grit in the mouth. We sit, straining to hear more of the vacuous nothingness— as if those making murmurs and platitudes could actually have the right words. Everyone fidgets. Everyone, ignoring the sucker-punch of mortality that even can happen to thirty-somethings. Like I am now; like he was.

Like a wave from the altar, all the way to us out in the back, everyone genuflects. The church bells start ringing; they must be electric as there's no movement in the belltower. The wails of the woman with black hair, throwing herself on the casket. The bright clouds above fairly blast along to the horizon. So are we all.

**Lisa López Smith**

**BARRIO GETSEMANÍ**  
**CARTAGENA, COLOMBIA**  
FOTOGRAFÍA DIGITAL



**Viviana Preston**

## LA SAL DE LA TIERRA

Sodio, un metal altamente reactivo,  
Y cloro, un gas venenoso,  
Se unen para formar algo  
Tan benigno como la sal de cocina.

Recordándonos que el crecimiento, la alegría  
verdadera  
Florece  
No en el aislamiento  
sino en la belleza de la conexión.

Sin embargo, muchos devalúan la sal,  
Muchos fallan en reconocer que tanto  
mejora nuestras vidas.  
Es un producto básico que a menudo  
damos por sentado,  
Pasado por alto hasta que se consuma  
en exceso.  
En nuestra búsqueda de crecimiento y  
conexión  
Podemos sacrificar partes de nosotros  
mismos,

Perdiendo el equilibrio en el proceso.  
Desmoronándonos como un terrón de sal,  
Llevando a una enfermedad que roba los  
dones de la vida.

El latido del corazón, la circulación,  
La alegría del sustento sencillo.

Por sencilla que sea, la sal es valiosa.  
La sal es fundamental.

Da vida, preserva,  
Da sabor, da sed  
Se puede compartir-  
Pasando la sal,  
Compartiendo estos regalos de la vida.

Sin las 4 oz. de sal en tu cuerpo,  
Tus músculos no se contraerían  
Tu sangre no circularía  
Tu comida no se digeriría  
Y tu corazón no latiría

La sal previene infecciones y el deterioro  
Se unta la sal sobre una herida  
para limpiarla  
Actuemos así para prevenir el deterioro en  
nuestras vidas  
Curando nuestras heridas a través de la  
conexión humana.

La sal se echa en todo,  
Sirviendo a los demás,  
No a si mismo.  
La sal es sabor  
Y crea sed para algo más  
Como la brisa salada que nos llama  
Para caminar por las costas y explorar.  
Una sed que evoca vivir con sabor  
Invitando a otros a preguntarse si  
Hay más en la vida.

Crea sed de algo  
Por la manera en que vives con sabor.

El verdadero significado reside  
En el entrelazar de vidas  
El vínculo vital  
Que nutre nuestra existencia

Un tapiz tejido con granos de sal,  
Cada hilo una conexión,  
Cada sabor un recordatorio  
De la belleza encontrada  
En los momentos simples y compartidos  
Que nutren nuestras almas.

**Viviana Preston**

## MACETA AZUL

En la esquina de la sala de espera (con A/C) de la central de autobuses de Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, hay una maceta azul de barro que mide aproximadamente medio niño de cinco años: o sea, el alto de un niño de cinco años promedio entre dos —de largo, claro—; de ancho quizá tres niños de cinco años: o sea, el ancho de un niño de cinco años promedio multiplicado por tres. Dicha maceta azul no cuenta con planta alguna, sólo tierra adentro. O quizá, admito, pero dudo, alguna semilla que no se asoma todavía a la superficie.

La maceta, a diferencia del niño de cinco años promedio, no es capaz de comprender nada, por lo que tampoco asimila lo que está pasando en la sala de espera con aire acondicionado. No reconoce lo improbable que resulta que los sillones de la sala sean, de hecho, cómodos. Y, por suerte, no escucha al señor a quince tenis talla 2 extendidos uno a lado de otro —tocando punta con talón, punta con talón— decir que viaja en autobús porque es más cómodo y más seguro, y para nada

tan horrible como todas las experiencias que ha tenido en las distintas aerolíneas del aeropuerto internacional de Puerto Vallarta en el que todas las macetas tienen plantas, sin duda alguna.

El señor, como saben de demás que sí pueden escucharlo sin necesidad de voltear a verlo, no puede costear el vuelo PVA-CDMX tantas veces como son las que necesita desplazarse en el mes, pero —y esto no lo saben todxs lxs demás que lo escuchan— incluso si pudiera costearlo no lo pagaría. Esto sí lo saben, en cambio, los dos chamacos ahora universitarios que tiene en la UAM cuyas camas tuvieron bases mucho después de que el señor tuviera una camioneta en la que le diera gusto que lo vieran llegar sus amigos a la chamba. Que si sus amigos fueran los encargados de ir a recogerlo al llegar de los largos traslados en busca de mercancía buena, bonita y barata —porque regalada no hay, ya se fijó—, lo esperarían en el aeropuerto, por su puesto. Pero en cambio lo recoge su esposa, que todavía no tiene burós en su recámara pero

a la que su esposo nunca le ha negado un desayuno con las amigas o la tatuada de ceja que su prima de Michoacán, en cambio, no entiende que su esposo no le de permiso de hacerse.

A 720 semillas de girasol —por escoger alguna semilla conocida— de la maceta azul sin planta, harta ya de escuchar la conversación del que que no puede costear el avión, está sentada una chica de cabello morado. La vida que queda en ese cabello es tan cuestionable como la que queda en la maceta. Aún así, una señora a 348 semillas de distancia, piensa que no se le ve mal. Esto no podrá descubrirlo nunca la chica, y mucho menos la maceta, pero a los trece años no había nada que la mujer quisiese más que haber tenido cabello rosa. Nunca se le hizo, y ahora mucho menos, y a su edad.

Se abre la puerta automática (como esas de súper mercado) de la sala. Entra otra chica, de cabello sano y sin jamás haber tenido intenciones de haberlo pintado ni

de nada que la hiciese llamar aún más la atención. Más que qué. Más que lo grande que se sentía habitando una ciudad en la que todas las otras utilizaban la menos ropa posible para no transpirar tanto, y ella no sabía cómo ocultar el cuerpo ni el sudor que le salía tratando de hacer esto primero. Se sienta en el asiento más alejado de lxs demás humanos — todxs más viejxs que el niño de cinco años promedio— y por lo tanto en el asiento al que menos le pega el aire acondicionado.

Ojalá que alguien rompiera la maceta sólo para saber si tiene vida adentro.

**Claudia Excaret Santos Campusano**

## 21 QUESTIONS BY AN IMMIGRANT

1. Qué ves cuando me miras?
2. What do you see when you look at me?
3. Do you want to know where I'm "originally from?"
4. Do you see an immigrant?
5. What are your thoughts when you think of an immigrant?
6. What do you feel when you hear the word immigrant?
7. Do you want to know why my family and I left our country?
8. Want me to tell you about the things we could not bring with us?
9. Or about the things that were not things, but made of blood instead?
10. Am I allowed to miss my land even though I left?
11. Have you ever been homesick to a home you cannot return to?
12. Should I describe what it feels like to speak but not be understood?
13. Or can I admit I tried so hard for years to cover any trace of my accent in order to avoid the jokes?
14. Have you ever felt the need to be accepted into a game not meant for you to play?
15. Can you tell by my curls how many times I forced them to be straight?
16. How many years do you think it takes to silence the voices that put us down?
17. And how many more to love ourselves?
18. How much understanding does it take to know why they look at our fathers and mothers with pity and not like the heroes they are?
19. Do you know the courage it takes to be proud of your culture, regardless of hate?
20. Do you see the strength it takes to find a home away from home?
21. Will you join us on this human journey that unites us?

**Leslie Mendoza**

# LISTA DE CONTRIBUIDORES

**J.E. Álamo** nació el año 1960 en el Reino Unido. Vive en España. Autor de fantasía, terror y fantasía urbana. Sus novelas y relatos se publican en editoriales españolas. *Sam y Yo* es su última novela.

**Gabo Alvarado-Lieber** was born and raised in Venezuela. His poetry has appeared in *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *the Acentos Review*, and *Spillwords Press*.  
<https://windspiel.substack.com>

**Tomás Baiza** is originally from San José, California. He is the author of *Delivery: A Pocho's Accidental Guide to College, Love, and Pizza Delivery*, and the collection *A Purpose to Our Savagery*.

**Daniel Barry** is currently loving his work as a preschool teacher in the greater Philadelphia area. He keeps a dream journal and has an unreasonable love for fava beans and figs.

**Julissa Beltran** is a Mexican-American college student from SC. Her work can be found in *Other Women Worldly Press*, *Broken Ink*, etc. She strives to make her work a voice for her community.

**César Brizuela** es originario de El Salvador, y ahora estudia en la Universidad de Arkansas en Fort Smith. Su fotografía fue tomada en El Salvador, todos disfrutando el hermoso momento del atardecer en la playa.

**Ariana Caballero** is a Mexican-American woman who grew up in Mexico before moving to the United States at the age of fifteen. She writes about her parents' hometown, Araró, Michoacán.

**Roger Camp** is the author of three photography books. His work has appeared in numerous journals including *The New England Review*, *North American Review* and *New York Quarterly*.

**Dr. Steve Davidson** is a clinical psychologist, Laguna Beach, California. His goal-oriented theory of personality is described in his book, *An Introduction to Human Operations Psychotherapy*.

**Angelica Esquivel** is a poet and artist from Ohio. She has work published in *Poet Lore*, *Barrelhouse*, and *Frontier Poetry*. She lives in Michigan, on occupied Potawatomi, Ojibwe, Ottawa, and Wyandot land.

**Rubén Flores** is a Mexican scholar and writer based in Ireland. He is working towards his first poetry collection provisionally titled *\*El aguacate y la higuera\**.

**Dany Morales Hernández** is a first-generation university graduate. Born and raised in Poteau, Oklahoma, she graduated from the University of Arkansas - Fort Smith in 2024 with a BA in Spanish and a minor in Teaching English as a Second Language.

**Brenda Liliana Jovel** received her BA in Creative Writing and English at UC Riverside. She is passionate about Latine cultura and family, prominent themes in her work. She is from Van Nuys, California.

**Gray Collier Langston** is a visiting professor at the University of Fort Smith. One of her hobbies is writing songs and instrumentals, which reflect her love of music of Spanish-speaking countries.

**Mario Loprete**, Catanzaro 1968.

**Nina Maar** is an angel bound to a pair of sneakers. Their personal work consists of strange body horror, the different forms angels take, and teeth. They are originally from Tres Ríos, Costa Rica.

**Evan McClellan**, a student at UAFS, explores themes of sacrifice and hope in his art and poetry, “La despedida” and “Viaje de sangre,” both of which follow the events of *La Tatuana* by Miguel Asturias.

**Natalia Mejía E.** es una escritora colombiana, radicada en Estados Unidos. Natalia escribe sobre el aislamiento de los inmigrantes y el impacto que en ellos tiene la separación de todo lo conocido.

**Leslie A. Mendoza** es originaria de México y creció en California. Sus palabras han encontrado un hogar en varias publicaciones. Continuará escribiendo poesía hasta caer en el siguiente plano de vida.

**Isabella Moreno** is a proud Nuyorican from The Bronx, writing and blossoming in Cleveland. She is the founder of “Illuminating Our Voices,” writing workshops for creatives of color. Contact: FB or IG.

**Erik Peters** is a teacher, father, and avid medievalist from Canada. Erik’s writing has been published in numerous magazines. Read all Erik’s publications at [www.erikpeters.ca](http://www.erikpeters.ca) or @erikpeterswrites.

**Vivana Preston** is a sophomore at the University of Arkansas - Fort Smith. She is majoring in Spanish with a minor in TESL.

**Veronica Puente** writes to examine the legacy of Mexican culture across borders. She is pursuing her MFA at UT El Paso. She lives in Austin with her husband, cross-eyed cat, and wild German Shepherd.

**Santiago de Rábago-León** (Madrid, 1996), es un joven poeta y editor musical. La poesía es su pasión y la cultiva desde niño. Su formación le permite leer en inglés, francés y español, su lengua natal.

**Víctor Manuel Ramos** es un periodista y escritor de origen dominicano. Es autor de *La vida pasajera*; *Morirsoñando: Cuentos agridulces, 1998-2008*; y *Bienvenido a la patria y otros cuentos ausentes*.

**V. Rodrigo** is a lesbian writer from Valencia, Venezuela. She is currently studying at University Wisconsin-Madison. She has been featured in *Foglifter*.

**Claudia Santos** (@claudiaexcaret) is a Mexican English Major, poet, interpreter, translator, and cultural gestor.

**Lisa López Smith** is a shepherd, poet, novelist, and mother living in the high desert of central Mexico. She likes sharks, *huizaches*, and good trouble.

Originally from Cholula, Mexico, **Sandra S. Smithers** is a poet and a traveler; her first book *Cartas a un Astronauta* (2020), established a path for her to continue to write about the Latin experience.

**Steven Valenzuela** is a Chicano poet and fiction writer. His work derives from “lived experiences, painful truths, and a unique cultural identity.” He is now a second year MFA student at UC Davis.

# The World Language Department at UAFS

The literary magazine *Azahares* forms part of the array of professional opportunities which the World Languages Department at the University of Arkansas – Fort Smith provides its students and the greater region.

As part of the focus on preparing students for success in a global society, the World Languages Department offers a Certificate of Proficiency in Spanish for the Helping Professions, with a specialization in either social services or healthcare. This certificate is open to current students as well as members of the larger workforce. In addition, students can obtain a Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) - Certificate of Proficiency, the TESL minor, a Spanish minor and an endorsement for Teaching English as a Second Language, grades P-12. TESL Certification allows teacher licensure candidates to add an Arkansas state ESL (English as a Second Language) endorsement to their teaching license. Current UAFS students can add these courses to enhance their future employability. Teachers already working in the field can add this endorsement as well. TESL Certification is also designed for international students who are preparing to teach English as a Second Language abroad.

For more information on the World Languages Department at UAFS, please feel free to contact Dr. Mary A. Sobhani, Department Head, at [Mary.Sobhani@uafs.edu](mailto:Mary.Sobhani@uafs.edu). Visit us at [www.uafs.edu](http://www.uafs.edu) or find us on Facebook @UAFS-World Languages Department and @UAFS Azahares.

# About this year's designs and layout

The Art Department at UAFS puts learning into action. Since the Spring of 2018, students working towards a Bachelor of Science in Graphic Design have designed the *Azahares Spanish Literary Magazine* as part of their sophomore-level Print & Publication class. Each student presents their design for both the cover and inside pages to the editorial board of the magazine, who in turn selects finalists. These students then head up teams, as might happen in a professional design studio, to complete the design, layout and typesetting of the entire magazine. The original cover designs that were presented to the Editorial Board appear below.



# Call for Submissions

*Azahares 2026*

At *Azahares*, we're looking for fresh work about the Latin experience: poetry that transports us into new perspectives; prose that makes us laugh or cry or sigh with satisfaction; art that lifts us towards the sublime or soothes us like *un chocolatito caliente* on a cold evening. We particularly enjoy publishing works that illustrate the best of what it means to be human.

*Azahares* is University of Arkansas-Fort Smith's award-winning bilingual creative literary magazine. The primary purpose of this magazine is to provide community members and students with an arena for creative expression in English or Spanish, as well as a literary space for writing that presents the themes of the Latin experience.

The *azahar*, or orange blossom, is a flower of special meaning. Representative of new life and purity, *azahares* form part of the iconic tradition of the Latin world, embodying a freshness of spirit and perspective captured with this publication.

Submissions are open to all members of the community.



To submit:

<https://azaharesliterarymagazine.submittable.com/submit>



<https://uafs.edu/academics/colleges-and-schools/college-of-arts-and-sciences/departments/resources/azahares.php>

**ELECTRICITY**



**Angelica Esquivel**

*“Lo que diferencia azar de azahar,  
lo que hace que el uno no huela a  
nada y el otro sí, es la h, que es una h  
de perfumería.”*

— Ramón Gómez de la Serna,  
*Greguerías*



UAFS™