



Azahares



2026

Spanish Language
Literary Magazine

Azahares 2026

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.

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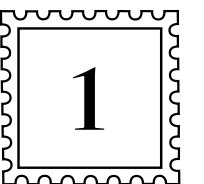
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Azul que no termina - Jalisco, Mexico
Por Claudia Santos
Fotografía digital

University of Arkansas - Fort Smith



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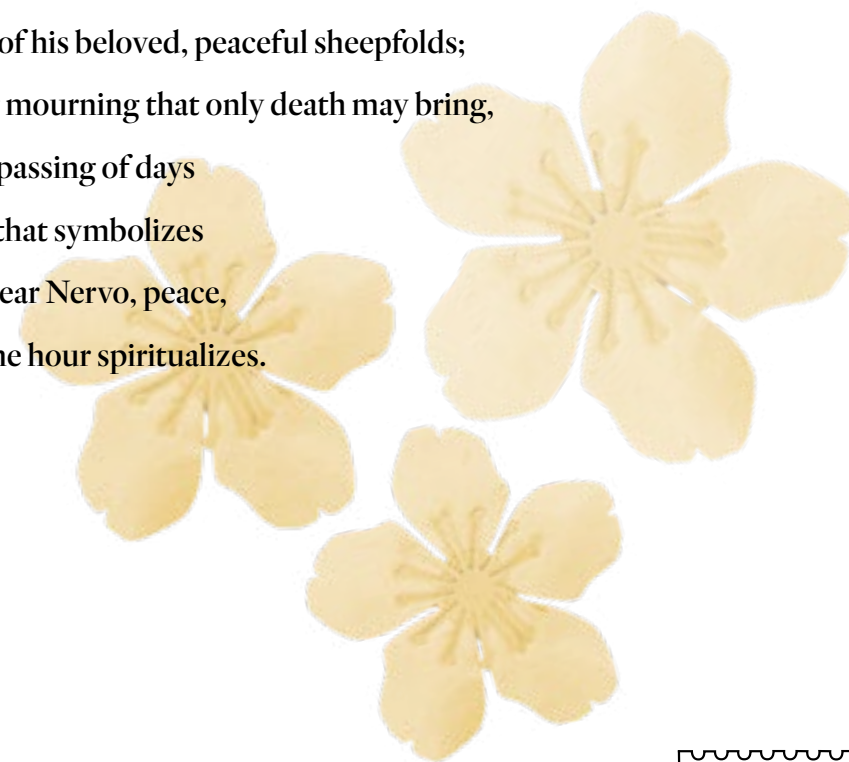
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Amado Nervo

Por Charles Haddox

Su alma exiliada aún idealiza
los pequeños muros blancos,
pan fresco, mortero de caliza,
los pies de la amada, rediles tranquilos;
el largo luto, que solo la muerte realiza,
y el paso de los días
en una celda que simboliza
la paz, querido Nervo, la paz,
que la hora espiritualiza.
His exiled soul still idealizes
the small white walls,
fresh bread, limestone mortar,
the feet of his beloved, peaceful sheepfolds;
the long mourning that only death may bring,
and the passing of days
in a cell that symbolizes
peace, dear Nervo, peace,
which the hour spiritualizes.



El Señor de Chalma

Por Charles Haddox

Ese fruto tónico del árbol cacao,
cosechado con los dedos,
y la recolección de naranjas rojas
abrazadas por espuelas ocultas,
dan fuerza a los astutos peregrinos
a través del viento y el fuego.

Hay un solo árbol de la vida.

Soberano del cosmos,
su gran obra es el amor y la vida,
fruto del árbol del sacrificio.
Aquí, en este laberinto,
pródigo con granadas,
vestido de hojas medicinales,
construido con pasta de caña,
manchado de sangre,
el árbol de la vida,
casa segura de libertad,
puerta del alba.
Árbol, regado por un templo.
Su cuerpo, el templo.
Agua para un arroyo enmendador
sangre que fluye de su costado.

¿Por qué tanto sufrimiento del inocente?
¿Por qué le hice esto a mi amigo?

¡Y de repente, con la noche invisible,
nuestras familias bailan en sus camas!
El poema, como una calabaza de cristal,
devuelve las alegrías
tras los viajes diarios al sol
y las tierras nupciales de la primavera,
coronadas por puentes y escaleras.

Plenarias y sublimes,
las ramas trazan los cielos,
siguiendo los vientos enroscados.

Él construyó un refugio eterno,
con madera del árbol de la vida.

El tricolor

Por Charles Haddox

En todas las tienditas de abarrotes
que permanecen olvidadas,
escondidas en la maleza de mis calles,
sostenidas por los árboles de mi barrio—
entre las papas fritas y la cerveza,
botes de sopa y latas de leche,
hay tres hileras de productos;
filas ordenadas, siempre iguales.


Chiles verdes, campos después de la lluvia,
cebollas blancas, calientes como estrellas,
tomates rojos, cerosos como sellos.

Deseo saludarlos con cantos,
y oír tocar un clarín,
por amor al pueblo sin fronteras
con colores de la bandera mexicana.



Ni de aquí, Ni de allá

Por Cassandra Guevara



Ni de aquí, ni de allá
My único país es mi mente
La única patria que me aclama
Son los sueños que me guardo
La tierra que corre por mis venas
Es la que me imagino
En aquel país colorido
Donde mi existencia no
Es un estorbo,
Un problemita
Que resolver.

Algún día seré
De aquí y de allá
Y de todos lados.



Triángulo Azul/Blue Triangle

By Amelia Díaz Ettinger

I tell myself I don't care
que no me importa un colmillo

but I see Bad Bunny on TV,
la bandera of Puerto Rico flying behind him,

the flag and the dancers in a parranda
a formation with bongos and maracas

and the sound of a plena, (¡A Plena!)
during the late-night show,

and just as unexpected
as the dialogue that follows

in two languages, my face is wet.
¿Por qué carajo lloro?

It isn't my island, I tell myself, no es mi patria,
And I wasn't born there, and yet some tender

moments of growing up wrapped in plantains,
melao, and the suffocating paternal love

and all the uneasiness of home comes back
floating like mangrove pods

These dumb tears on my face
¿Es mi llanto a cry of something lost?

Or is it a step
onto that single star of that flag

dancing on their shoulders that makes me
feel emboldened as its blue triangle



San Pablo Villa de Mitla, Oaxaca Mexico
Por César V. Brizuela Zelaya
Fotografía digital

Poem In Which

By Amelia Díaz Ettinger

i try to bottle all the words of caution
and wish to exit all the words of praise

for the hopes we aspire to grasp
like lichen or moss

or maybe the soft tickle
under a granddaughter's chin

comforts that liquify
when confronted with

the lack of bird songs
among the Poplars

or the continued shadowy vigilance
of ICE— a raid that bottles

humans like pray
away

from lichen, moss, or a child's
sweet breath



The Border

By Amelia Díaz Ettinger

If you look at the bare
gums of a newborn
you have reached

the happiest place

there in that softness
without bars
just a red-pink border

that can easily
be crossed
by mother's milk

SNAP

By Jess Addis

Sometimes, I still remember the despair in your eyes,
As we lined up in the checkout line,
Nine boxes of hamburger helper,
I think I'm too pretty to have to eat.
So, I sit at the table and pretend to maneuver around my plate,
Thinking one day, I'll sit in beautiful restaurants with pretty black plates,
And he'll tell me I can order whatever I want...
McDonald's a late night drunk stop,
Not a thirty-five-minute walk,
Once a month, as a "treat" in a South Texas parking lot.
Minimum wage is three dollars, so we dig for quarters in corners of couches,
For the black bags of laundry we load into grocery carts,
To walk thirty-five minutes, across from the Once-a-Month McDonalds,
And then walk our clean clothes back in black bags and grey carts,
Sweating up and down hills through Los Angeles heights,
Clothes we just washed, sweating among their own socks.
The four of us live on Lone Star, SNAP in other states,
It's hardly enough, for older brother in football.
Eldest daughter in swim.
More Goya rice and fideo,
Buttered tortillas topped with American cheese,
Rolled just tight,
And the girl in me just wants to snap,
Watching her try to even entertain Thanksgiving.
So, I eat extra at school and friends' houses.
Twenty years later, just me,
I still pray and near cry in grocery lines,
Even though I know my card won't decline.



Accidente

By Victor Hugo Mendevil

May I put this amulet of a leaf
in my book, or is this disrespectful?

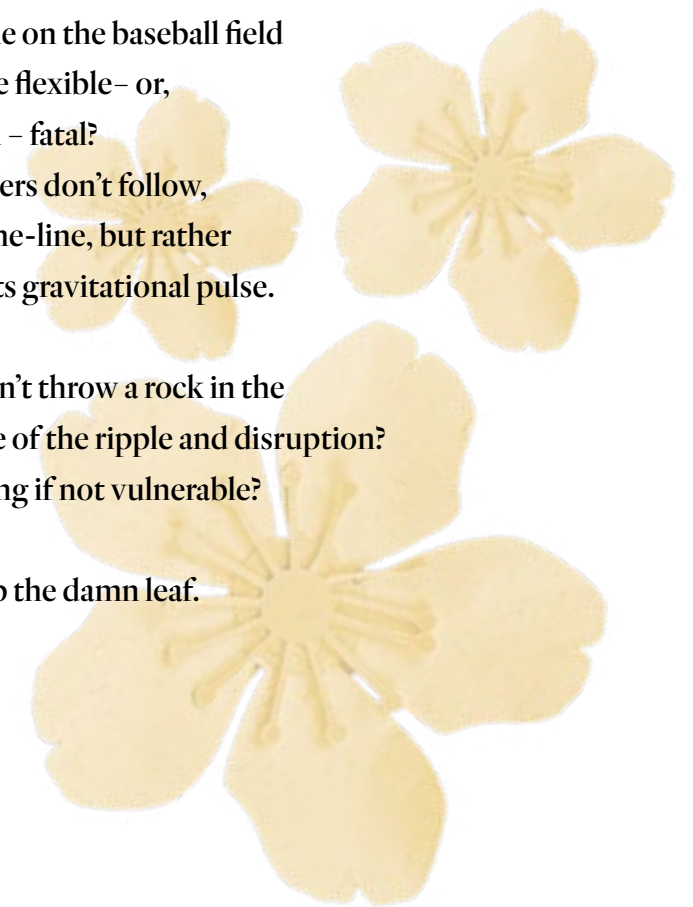
May the feather of the shedding-bird
be-mine, a note to clip in my hair?

I find ethics to be endlessly diminishing,
disallowing those of us alive to use the dead,
or at least dance with them in their clothes.

Is modernity a mouse we shouldn't kill?
Is my life a painted line on the baseball field
-to be followed- to be flexible- or,
with the wrong coach - fatal?
I know the larger players don't follow,
magnet-like, down-the-line, but rather
bubble and teeter in its gravitational pulse.

What is this life if I can't throw a rock in the
pond, just for the sake of the ripple and disruption?
What use is any writing if not vulnerable?

Let me be and pick up the damn leaf.



TAR

By Jess Addis



The world is burning,
So I took a lighter and match,
And set fire to my craft,
So my nails could saw and sear my keyboard,
So black plastic can burn and rise,
Sting wide nostrils, smoke Spanish shaped eyes,
With memories of my community in zip ties,
Hoping its loud clack might drown and drown,
The images of that little girl's tears,
As her mom was forcefully pushed down,
By a non-native in a black vest,
Twisting our poetry into tar,
To gag our syllables and curls,
As white women recorded and watched, for their performative internet fodder,
A small brown girl escorted home, without her father.

So I go deep in the iambics of colonizer language,
Because they cut, lynched, and burned our tongues,
In the Rio Grande of Texas,
And from Boston,

I can hear the screams of Chicago and Canal Street.

They can come and hang me from the Texas Oak
Trees,

In high June,
Before they take the words in me,

They can tighten the rope,
Make it a hundred degree day,
Scorched earth and crackling grass,
The smell of magnolias and cookouts,
They will see the blue come over me,
Before they take the Mexican me.



El periquito, Santa Maria El Tule
Por César V. Brizuela Zelaya
Fotografía digital

"MOONA: 7:30 PM"

By Jess Addis

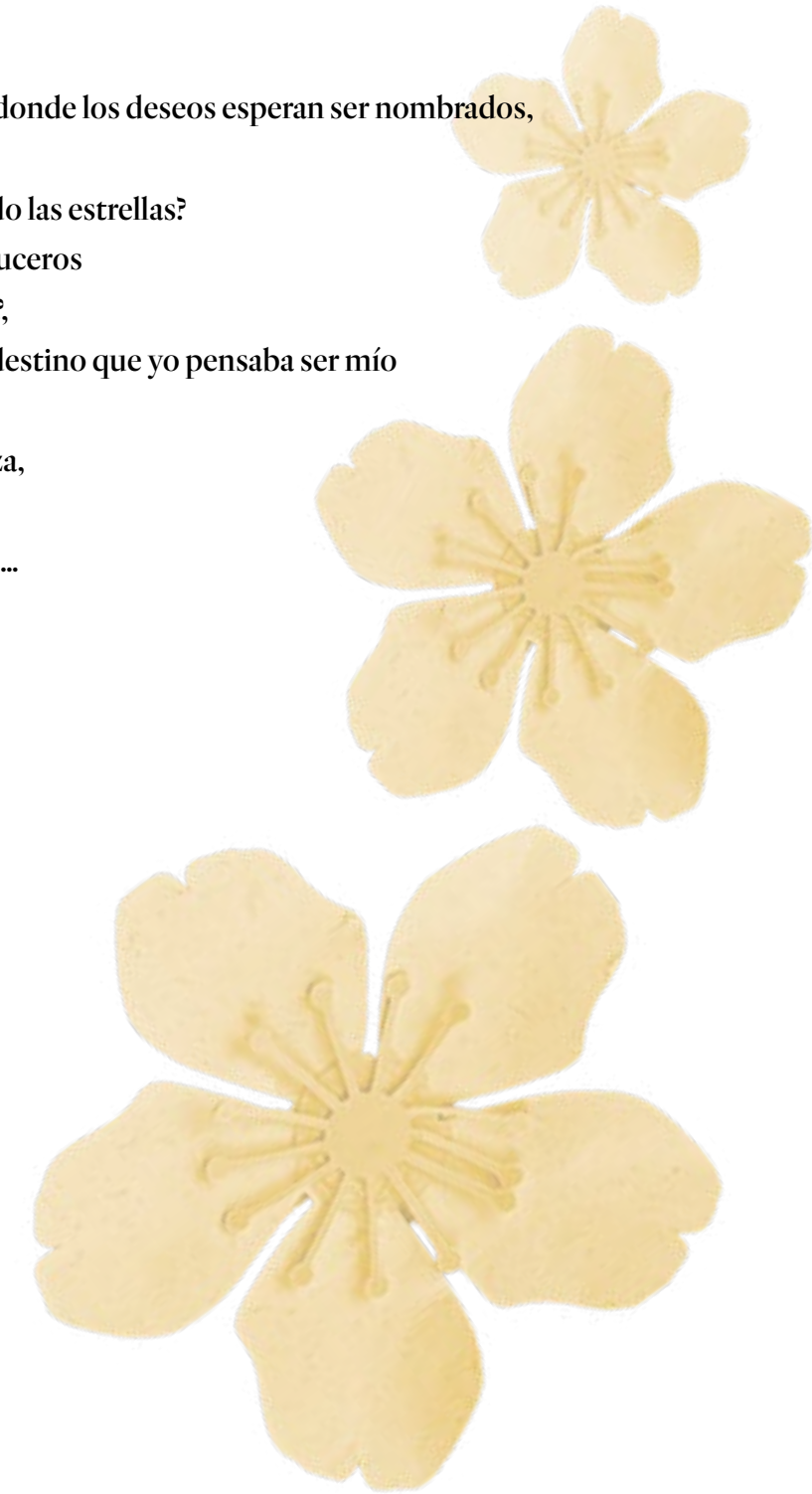
I wanna say I'm sorry, Ma.
For pistachio baklava and blush martinis,
They call me 'revolutionary' and 'artist,' now, Ma.
I should have been writing,
Protesting in the streets,
But I wanted to celebrate,
Poetry and a books release,
I wanted to forget for a night, or two, or three, or a few hundred,
ICE in Chicago streets,
The trill of my 'r' in 'write,'
When I write, as I write.
Wanted to forget 'revolutionary' and 'artist,'
Means bullets in the back, Ma.
To them,
It's just my wetback.



Si nunca hubiera visto las estrellas

Por Aislinn Martínez

¿Habría sido mejor nunca conocerlas
nunca haber sabido que existen esferas donde los deseos esperan ser nombrados,
deseos que acarician mi soledad?
¿Habría sido mejor nunca haber conocido las estrellas?
Nunca haber sabido de los millones de luceros
que nos murmuran infinitas esperanzas?
¿de nunca haber oído como desafían el destino que yo pensaba ser mío
estos hoyuelos en el velo nocturno
por donde la noche bebe su propia fuerza,
la misma que cobija la tierra,
por donde se me escapan mis nostalgias...
¿Habría sido mejor no saber?



Plantains

By Victor Hugo Mendevil

I knew that they were green,
sometimes brown,
sour when raw,
good (if you cooked them right)
and that my father loved them.
Abuela Salida used to fry them all the time.

Mama warned me they don't taste like bananas...

Heavy, aren't they?
They're a pretty popular side dish,
and Whole Foods calls them "exotic."
Well, they're actually a low-profile fruit—
even though we all have different names for them.
In Mexico, we call them plátanos,
the way Witnesses call God by His name
and I call my father by his.

Why did I wait so long to try them?
I wasn't afraid of the taste.
There was just this particular voice that
reached my ear when they were mentioned...
...they can be a chip, a side dish, a dessert
anything you can think of,
if you haven't had them in your life before.

Some are used to make beer,
grab me a beer—
why is that a memory?
My sister caught her finger in a can of beer,
or was it coca cola—
what was he drinking with those plantains?

Her finger: it bleeds;
what did we give her to stop crying?
Stitches, food, tamales, maybe some Cheetos
or Sprite in a bottle.
Maybe Salida made my sister some fried plantains.

California makes me cry

By Victor Hugo Mendevil

I. The California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection

To gaslight an entire coast of a country—
it must take
unfathomable greed to do such a thing.

The red sun hazes by as I drive further from the pale
fog. California's ash continues to creep in view of any
sensible outline, skyline. In secret, I wish for the dust cloud
to roll over my bed sheets before I get home.

I haven't felt heat in years, so I'm frightened
of what rises and blows from California. I want a sun
to sting my bare cheeks like dry ice, I want the skin of my
nose
to flake off from the burn, let the smoke pull
more tears out of me than staring into the sun does.

II. The Smokejumpers

I wonder if the wildfire burns where my father lives.
At home, a burnt cloud blew through my half-broken
fans, but with no one there to care, I still used them.
Under peaks of trees, the smoke billows and no firefighter
can hose off my throat's coal-tinged breath.

I hope the window screen my fan stands against
will keep this surrounding smoke out. It's meant to catch
wind, but allows gnats and flies through, so what good
will it do by protecting me? Best to let the sun turn red again,
like it did a day ago.

I live in house-held love, with no A/C.
So, I urge the wings of my electric fan to
spin out the smoke from my room.
Instead, it spins it in. A petal of paternal poison.



Presidencia Municipal San Pablo Villa de Mitla, Oaxaca, Mexico
Por César V. Brizuela Zelaya
Fotografía digital

Juan Bimba

por Israel Muratalla

*Con mis tres o con su cuanтро,
cante, Juan Bimba,
yo lo acompaño*
Nicolás Guillén

Lo curioso de la época de los cuentos de hadas es que la gente solamente recuerda lo mágico y lo fantástico, pero incluso en esos tiempos existía lo ordinario como lo era Juan Bimba. Sin magia y ni una gota de fantástico, Juan Bimba era un camperuso más y lo triste de todo era que el chico no tocaba el campo ni por accidente. Pasaba su tiempo en la cocina de su casita en el campo haciendo arepas con su madre, día y noche. A Juan Bimba no le molestaba cocinar, pero era cierto que ya se encontraba harto de tanta arepa. Todo el campo había probado alguna vez las famosas arepas de Mamá. De lleva y trae, era que también en el pueblo se conocía de las riquísimas arepas de “la señora del campo,” la llamaban, como si todas fueran una misma. Igual como le decían a la señora que cocía sombreros y a la señora que podía crear con cerámica cualquier cosa, quienes también mandaban sus productos al pueblo. Con lo conocido que era el platillo estrella de su madre, uno pensaría que fueran ricos, pero era que ella nunca fue buena para los negocios. Terminaban regalando más de lo que vendían e incluso cuando cobraba, su mamá tenía el afán de dar las cosas casi

de gratis por el amor a la cocina. Juan Bimba no amaba ni la cocina ni las arepas ni siquiera el oro. Él lo que amaba era el canto.

Noche y día, ahí amasando con su mamá, algún son siempre hallaba lugar en sus labios. Sin tener alguna idea de ello, el chico cantaba más bello que un turpial. Más nunca nadie había escuchado esa gran voz además de su propia madre. Ella disfrutaba del canto de su hijo por supuesto, pero también era cierto que después de tanto tarareo todo el día, uno se puede hartar. Ella que había vivido y conocido más, reconoció siempre que el talento de su hijo era poco común y era por eso mismo que le advertía siempre lo imprudente que era cantar estando fuera de esa casita. Temía que esa voz llevaría su hijo a dejarla como hacía mucho los había dejado el padre de Juan Bimba por sacudir capachos para el Rey y en realidad, cocinar arepas día y noche noche y día era mucho trabajo para hacerlo todo ella sola.

Entonces fue que así siguió Juan Bimba sin conocer la barbaridad de esa voz que llevaba consigo siempre hasta un día preciso, en que su mamá lo mandó al pueblo por extracto de vainilla. “Anda,

que tengo antojo de algo dulce.” Había dicho y como eran muy pobres para siquiera un burro con el cual andar pa'riba y pa'bajo, le tocaba a Juan Bimba caminar a todas partes. El camino del campo al pueblo era muy largo y más que nada era demasiado tiempo para andar uno sin cantar. Juan Bimba aguantó media hora andando antes de que empezara a darse manotazos contra la cadera como si fuera tambora. Solo estoy tocando. Seguro no cuenta como cantar, pensó. Por más que no estuviera de acuerdo, Juan Bimba mantenía siempre en mente las órdenes de su mamá. Pero a los quince minutos se encontró silbando la Tonada de Luna Llena. *Solo estoy silbando. Seguro no cuenta como cantar.*

“Fiu fiu fiuuuu, fiu fiu. Fiu fiu fiuuuu, fiu fiu,” y así se perdió Juan Bimba chiflando como todo un loco, satisfecho con el pretexto que se había inventado para evadir de cierta forma las instrucciones de su mamá. De repente fue que se le paró encima un ave ámbar, con la cola, las alas, y la cara más negra que la del mismo Juan Bimba. Sin verla bien, supo de inmediato que era un turpial al escuchar el ave cantar su mismo silbido. “Piu piu piuuuu, piu piu. Piu piu piuuuu, piu piu.” Eufórico, así se fue caminando y silbando con el turpial puesto sobre su sombrero de cogollo. “Fiu fiu fiuuuu, fiu fiu. Fiu fiu—”

“¡Vaya voz tiene ese pájaro! Jamás he escuchado algo como tal,” interrumpió la dulce voz de una chica. Era ella muy bonita de buen vestido que no podría venir de otra parte más que el pueblo.

“Es el turpial.”

“He escuchado el canto de un turpial cientos de veces y jamás he oído que hagan coro como se lo hace a usted. Deben ser pájaros los dos.”

“No soy ningún pájaro, soy Juan Bimba y soy músico,” se vio la necesidad de aclarar.

“Juan Bimba serás, pero músico ni de chiste con esos trapos que llevas de ropa.”

“Escúchame cantar y verás que mi voz es grande.”

“Aver, canta,” dijo la chica y Juan Bimba no vio más que hacerle caso, pero lo que más quería era dejar callada a la niña por haber hablado tanto y un poco impresionarla.

*“Juan Bimba soy
y mi voz me llevará donde voy.”*

Y sí, la chica quedó calladita boquiabierta adorando ahora a Juan Bimba.

“¡Cante, Juan Bimba, yo lo acompaño!”

“¿Pero acompañaradónde? Preciso ir ahora al pueblo por extracto de vainilla para mi madre.”

“Justo ahí. Una voz como la tuya no se puede desperdiciar en el campo. En la cantina podrían escuchar cantar todas las noches al gran Juan Bimba. Imagina,” dijo ella y justo eso hizo Juan Bimba, encantado con la idea de vivir cantando y no hacer ni una arepa más. *Solo estoy cantando, y si así presumo mi ignorancia, que me odie el mundo entero,* pensó el chico. Entonces, se dejó olvidar por completo el ex-

tracto de vainilla y se echó a andar con la chica quien se le unió aplaudiendo y repitió “¡Cante, Juan Bimba, yo lo acompaño!”

*“Juan Bimba soy
y mi voz me llevará adónde voy.”*

Al cantar ahí por el sendero que entraba al pueblo, se fue uniendo una multitud de gente impresionada con semejante voz. Iban todos marchando y aplaudiendo algunos sin saber siquiera a donde acompañaban. “¡Cante, Juan Bimba, yo lo acompaño!” Así siguieron Juan Bimba y su turpial, junto a la chica y los demás hasta llegar a la entrada de la cantina donde el dueño los recibió con incredulidad.

“Esta es la voz de la cual se escucha hablar,” dijo el señor. “A ver niño, canta.”

*“Juan Bimba soy
y mi voz me llevará adonde voy”*

“Es verdad que tienes una voz como ninguna,” dijo el dueño. “Pero una voz como la tuya es muy grande para acabar cantándole a un montón de borrachos en una simple cantina como la mía.”

“¿Cómo no?” dijo la chica bonita que había convencido a Juan Bimba de venir ahí.

“Una voz así tendría que estar cantando para el Rey,” y fue la manera en que todo presente empezó a retumbar en acuerdo que más sorprendió a Juan Bimba, quien jamás se hubiera imaginado que tanta gente podría disfrutar de su voz.

Entonces se echaron a andar Juan Bimba y su turpial, la chica y su multitud, con el dueño y su

cantina entera, todos camino al castillo del Rey. Escalaban cantando el empinado sin fin de escaleras que separaban el pueblo del reino. Al cabo era el día semanal en que el Rey permitía a cualquier pobre subir esos escalones para otorgarles una sola súplica, obvio sin promesa alguna de cumplirla que rara vez lo hacía. “¡Cante, Juan Bimba, yo lo acompaño!”

*“Juan Bimba soy
y mi voz me llevará adonde voy”*

“¿Qué es eso que escucho?” preguntó una voz profunda que comandaba el silencio como solo un Rey podía.

Juan Bimba subió el último escalón donde se encontró cara a pie del Rey, altísimo sentado en su trono.

“Mi nombre es Juan Bimba y soy músico—”
“¿Vestido así?”

Juan Bimba siguió. “Me gustaría cantar para usted. Toda esta gente me dice que tengo una voz digna de cantar para el Rey. ¿Gustaría usted escucharla?”

“Como no escucharla si subes mis escalones glugluteando como un mero guajolote. No ando en busca de nuevo payaso que me cante y siéndote sincero, Juan Bimbas, disfruto más de un joropo o un merengue rico. Eso de las tonadas me pone demasiado triste así que mejor échate a andar antes de que me pongas a llorar.”

Era cierto que Juan Bimba no conocía las complejidades de los géneros, pero él lo que amaba era cantar y la música que fuera, era lo de menos.

Sin embargo, lo último que deseaba Juan Bimba era poner a llorar al Rey. Entonces obedeció. Junto al señor, su cantina, la chica, la gente, y el turpial que llevaba sobre el sombrero, Juan Bimba se dio la vuelta. Al bajar, los escalones parecían incluso más largos. En cuanto el Rey mostró la más mínima pérdida de interés, pronto el pueblo había hecho lo propio. Iban ahora en silencio y apagados como si fueran otros.

Cuando bajaron hasta la cantina del señor, Juan Bimba preguntó “¿Usted, aún quiere escucharme cantar?”

“Cantas muy bonito niño, pero oro me falta para contratar más talento y lamento decir que tengo que dejárselo a otro. Pero una voz como la tuya rapidito atrae lo suyo,” dijo el señor antes de volver con toda su clientela al establecimiento, cerrando las puertas en la cara de Juan Bimba.

De vuelta, él se echó a andar y la multitud no tardó en quedarse atrás al volverse la cosa tan triste. Hasta que quedaban solamente Juan Bimba y la chica bonita. Por lo cual él le preguntó:

“¿Y tú? ¿Aún quieres escucharme cantar?”

“En realidad no, eres un simple campesino,” dijo y no quiso corregirla Juan Bimba diciendo que él solo hacía arepas. La chica se echó a andar por otro sendero y el turpial pronto salió volando al no escucharlo cantar ni silbar más.

Así fue que quedó solito el Juan Bimba, tan simple como el simple, justo como había empezado el día. Cuando llegó a casa, ni siquiera pudo contarle a Mamá lo que había vivido ese día porque se la encontró enojadísima de que, al fin de todo, había olvidado la vainilla y entonces, no quedó más que calmarla con su canto.





Flores en púrpura
por Martha J Cantú
Acrílico sobre lienzo

el aguacero

By Lázaro Gutiérrez

the early 2000's in Cuba had very little entertainment. children played with makeshift toys in the streets, we called them carriolas—they were the most popular toy. skateboards made from wood or any available materials we could get our hands on. the kids would slide down the carless streets in these inventions to pass the time. the summers in Cuba were unforgiving, the kind of heat that angers, and as cruel as our government. we didn't have air conditioning. the only cooling friend we had was the air, some fans, and the aguacero.

when the aguacero came, my mom would urge me to go out and soak in it to relieve the heat. I never said no. I let the thick rain fall over me; it was cool on my skin, a gift from heaven in the scorching heat. the smell of the rain hitting the hot pavement permeated in the humid air. the water brought me company and joy. we didn't have much, but we had the rain.

today my son and I played together in the aguacero. we live in South Carolina where the summer heat is also unforgiving. but air conditioning is the norm here. my son is the age I was when we left Cuba. I tell him stories of my childhood. of the black and white tv that played cartoons on Saturday mornings and how my mother would sit me in front of it with a plate of fried plantains or whatever we had available.

the channels were limited. every now and then an American program would sneak through the tv static. I tell him about the distinct mandatory school uniforms, the crimson red shorts, white shirts, and blue pañoletas. but he doesn't really understand that the world I was born into is light years away from his. that my childhood, and the childhood of all the children of Cuba, is still marred by a great disease. that on the same planet, two eight-year-olds are living two completely different lives.

we stuck our heads under the downspout and let the rushed abundance of water soak us, so cool on our skin, so refreshing. we frolicked through the tall grass in the yard holding hands and laughing. our feet bare as we ran trying to catch the hurried droplets—little gems from the sky to cool the June heat.

my son looks like me, he smiles like me—when I was eight. I see myself in him, a little piece of me lives in him. and that piece gets to rejoice in all the things it was devoid of when it was a child in Cuba.

my sweet boy knows the rain like I did—but he doesn't know the frightening voice of the thunder—and he never will.

El lamento del cubano

Por Lázaro Gutiérrez

El lamento del cubano es furia perpetua
lágrimas escondidas, miseria normalizada,
tiempo robado, castigo inhumano,
sufrimiento máximo, gargantas que no pueden gritar,
oídos sin escuchar de la libertad en años.

El lamento del cubano no se escucha,
se siente solo por ellos, se manifiesta en hambre y calor,
humillación sin venganza, humillación sin vergüenza
trompetas que suenan de lo perdido,
guitarras, tambores y claves que cantan del pasado,
que recuerdan el sabor dulce de la independencia.

El lamento del cubano es pan con aceite,
agua con azúcar,
juegos en la calle, videojuegos alquilados
el lamento del cubano no se escucha,
porque el cubano busca la felicidad en la nada,
en la ausencia del respeto, en el asesinato de la dignidad
el cubano encuentra la felicidad en las reliquias
del pasado,
en el pensamiento de un día volver a ser libres,
en la ingeniosidad de la pobreza,
porque el cubano no se rinde,
el cubano aprende a vivir donde no hay vida,
el cubano crece donde no hay luz,
sonríe donde no hay comedia,

El cubano es una planta caribeña trasplantada
El cubano es cubano en Texas, en Nueva York,
El cubano es cubano en Madrid, en Hong Kong,
El cubano sonríe, baila y goza, entre llamas infernales
El cubano es huérfano de patria,
El cubano aprendió a ser contento con lo vacío,
El cubano en sufrimiento sabe que la vida es un carnaval,
sabe reírse de la angustia, sabe llorar,
sabe hacer de la nada lo exquisito,

Al cubano le robaron el sueño—
pero nunca ha olvidado cómo soñar.

En la Isla

Por Lázaro Gutiérrez

En la isla hay apagones—
concrete walls, mosquitoes as hungry as us,
we slap them off our skin as they feed
on our impoverished blood.

my mother plays Arjona on the stereo,
she made me hot dogs today,
perritos calientes from La Yuma,
once it was chicken, a whole leg quarter,
all for me, I felt like a king that day.

She watches me eat like she often does:
with a smile, pushing me to take one more bite,
to get real full. Her smile hides anger,
it hides frustration, she keeps it away from me.

They call me “tinguilillo”. My frame is thin,
my bones poke fun at my skin,
I know nothing more than this, nothing more than
the way that things have always been.

So bleak, so innocent, so ignorant,
so—I do not complain, because I know nothing more.
Somewhere my father yells:
“¡Me cago en el resingao gobierno de pinga este,
chico!”

But I lived under the illusion of happiness,
because mom and dad did their very best—
the very best they could do
in the very hell we called home.

When we left I left that child behind,
and my brain became obscured with
the internet—just like they told me it would,
but in this land I acquired a childhood,

Something I never knew before,
something they stole from me,
something I had to learn and understand,
that libertad was my right...not a privilege.

En la isla hay apagones,
En la isla hay necesidad,
En la isla hay hambre,
En la isla hay desigualdad,
En la isla hay niños y niñas
con corazones y sueños encarcelados
que gritan, que gritan con rabia,
por años felices robados,
—en patria— con esperanza
—en patria— sin libertad.

Un amor prohibido: Comedia en un acto

Por Alexandra Aguilar y Jocelyn Soriano

Escenario: Los reyes han propuesto una boda para su hijo Lorenzo, con Lucía, una mujer noble. Él está atrapado entre escoger el amor y su deber como futuro rey, porque se ha enamorado de Katerina, una mujer de clase baja.

Acto 1:

El rey y la reina están sentados en el trono con rostros estoicos, esperando a su hijo.

Rey Alberto: Hijo, hemos organizado esta junta para informarte sobre una propuesta que tu madre y yo hemos arreglado.

Reina Claudia: Lorenzo, es hora de que des un paso adelante y dejes atrás tus tonterías.

Lorenzo: ¿De que se trata, padre?

Rey Alberto: Se trata del matrimonio. Ha llegado el momento. Tu madre y yo hemos decidido que es hora de que te cases.

Rey Alberto: Hemos hablado con una familia respetable y han aceptado la propuesta. Te casarás con su hija, Lucía. Es joven, educada... capaz de ser la futura reina.

Lorenzo levanta su voz

Lorenzo: ¿Qué dicen? ¡No quiero casarme con esa mujer! ¡Podría hacer cualquier cosa, pero no esto!

Rey Alberto: ¡Cállate! No tienes derecho a hablar-nos así. Te hemos dejado hacer lo que has querido y nunca has afrontado las consecuencias. Esta decisión es final. No importa que no quieras casarte con ella; lo harás.

Lorenzo baja la cabeza, sus puños cerrados.

Reina Claudia: Yo sé que no quieres esto, cariño, pero tienes que hacerlo. Tu padre envejece, y pronto serás rey. Es tu deber.

Lorenzo: ¡Pero, madre, no entiendes! ¡No puedo casarme con ella, yo—!

La reina interrumpe a Lorenzo.

Reina Claudia: Si, hijo, entiendo perfectamente. Sé por qué dices que no puedes casarte con Lucía. Has estado viéndote con una inútil, una chica sin clase.

Reina Claudia: Estás actuando como un niño, jugando a escondidas con ella. ¿Qué dirán de nosotros cuando descubran que el futuro rey anda con una gata?

Lorenzo: ¡No hables así de ella! ¡No sabes qué clase de persona es Katerina!

Reina Claudia: ¡No importa! Sé que ella es una de esas mujeres que solo quieren la riqueza. Katerina te está usando, y tú, como idiota, la dejas que te use. Ella no te ama, hijo, y lo verás muy pronto.

Lorenzo mira a su madre, el odio en sus ojos.

Reina Claudia: Escúchame bien, hijo. Terminarás lo que tienes con Katerina y nunca la volverás a ver. ¿Entiendes?

Lorenzo no dice nada, con la cabeza vuelta hacia un lado.

La reina alza la voz

Reina Claudia: Te pregunté algo. ¿Me entiendes? ¿Sí o no?

Lorenzo responde a la reina, con los dientes apretados

Lorenzo: Sí, madre, te entiendo.

El rey se levanta de su trono, sus palabras, definitivas

Rey: ¡Basta, Lorenzo, ¡compórtate! Ya no eres un niño. Te casarás con Lucía.

Lorenzo se quedó allí, mientras los reyes se retiran.

Acto 2:

Lorenzo y Katerina se ven al otro lado del jardín donde nadie puede verlos.

Katerina: Lorenzo, pensé que ya no vendrías, te he estado esperando.

Lorenzo: Perdón, pero mis padres me han dado noticias en las que yo no estoy de acuerdo.

Katerina: ¿Qué te han dicho tus padres? ¿Has estado llorando, amor?

Lorenzo se dio la vuelta, su espalda hacia Katerina.

Lorenzo: No me digas amor, Katerina, no creo que esto funcione...

Katerina: ¿Qué? ¿De qué estás hablando? ¿Algo sucedió?

Lorenzo: No, nada simplemente ya no siento amor hacia ti.

Katerina no respondió, se dio la vuelta y fue corriendo hacia el lado opuesto del jardín. Lorenzo se volteó y lloraba mientras miraba a Katerina correr.

Lorenzo en su cuarto, enojado, golpeó la pared

Reina Claudia: Hijo, ¿qué te pasa? Para de golpear la pared que te lastimara la mano.

Lorenzo: Por supuesto eso es lo que te importa, mi apariencia.

Reina Claudia: Lorenzo por supuesto que no, pero tienes que entender que es tu deber cumplir con las reglas como futuro rey.

Lorenzo: Mamá, realmente no te importa mi felicidad, ¿no me dejaras estar con la mujer que realmente amo?

Reina Claudia: Hijo, tienes que entender que la vida no siempre es justa. Pronto entenderás, y serás igual que tu padre, un rey.

Lorenzo: ¿Tu realmente amas a mi padre? Yo he visto fotos en donde estás sonriendo de cuando estabas joven y nunca te he visto sonreír en las fotos tan ampliamente en nuestras fotos familiares.

Reina Claudia se quedó callada, y con los ojos casi llorosos, decidió retirarse del cuarto. Mientras Lorenzo empezó a escribir una carta a Katerina.

La carta:

Mi querida Katerina, lamento haberte ofendido esta noche, pero debes entender que algún día seré el rey de este país y tengo reglas que seguir. Pero debes saber que te amo y lucharé por nuestro amor, pero por lo tanto es mejor que cada uno siga su camino. No quiero ponerte en peligro, ya que mi familia no está contenta con nuestro amor. Preferiría que escucharas de mi parte, que mis padres han organizado una boda con Lucía, no estoy de acuerdo ya que mi amor merece estar contigo. Te amo Katerina y siempre te amaré.

Príncipe Lorenzo

Acto 3:

Martes 10 de mayo, once de la mañana.

Desde la distancia, se puede ver a los sirvientes corriendo, tratando de preparar todo para Lucía.

Dos horas después.... Lucía sale de su carruaje, una mira desinteresada en su rostro. Pero ella cambia su expresión cuando el rey y la reina se acercan a ella.

Rey Alberto: Hola, Lucía, estamos muy contentos de tenerte aquí con nosotros.

Reina Claudia: ¡Sí, hemos estado esperando tu llegada! Espero que tu viaje haya ido sin problemas.

La reina se acerca a ella, sosteniéndose en brazos de Lucía mientras se saludan con besos.

Lucía se inclina ante la reina, luego ante el rey.

Lucía: Sí, todo salió bien. Gracias por permitirme venir aquí y vivir en su casa. Me siento honrada de haber sido elegida por ustedes.

Rey Alberto: Sí, bueno, sabíamos que tú eres la persona perfecta para estar con nuestro hijo.

Lucía: Si me permite, ¿Dónde está el príncipe?

El rey y la reina se dan una mirada, ya teniendo una idea de dónde está Lorenzo.

Reina Claudia: Está en el pueblo, haciendo negocios importantes.

Lucía: Oh, está bien, le entiendo. ¿Sabe cuándo volverá? Me gustaría conocerlo antes de que sea demasiado tarde.

Rey Alberto: Pronto estará aquí, no te preocupes. Mientras tanto, ¿por qué no vas a la habitación en la que te quedarás? También, puedes pedirle a uno de los sirvientes que te muestre el castillo.

Lucía: Sí, su majestad, creo que lo haré, gracias.

Lucía se inclina ante el rey y la reina, un poco molesta por que Lorenzo no estaba allí para recibirla. Cinco de la tarde: Lucía está sentada enfrente de su espejo, murmurando para sí misma mientras espera la cena.

Lucía: ¡Uf, No lo puedo creer! ¿Por qué no está aquí todavía? ¿No sabe quién soy?

Una sirvienta toca la puerta

Sirvienta: Disculpe, señorita, pero ya es hora para cenar. El rey y la reina la esperan.

Lucía: ¡Bien, gracias! Enseguida salgo.

Lucía se levanta de la silla, asegurándose de que todo en su aspecto era perfecto. Sigue a la sirvienta, que la esperaba, deseando que Lorenzo esté allí.

Lucía se inclina ante el rey y la reina

Lucía: Lamento haberlos hecho esperar, me estaba arreglando.

Rey Alberto: No te preocupes, Lucía, no pasa nada. Por favor, toma asiento. La cena está a punto de servirse.

Lucía: Sí, majestad, gracias.

Lucía camina para sentarse, cuando se da cuenta de que hay un hombre sentado allí. Se sienta en la silla opuesta a él, haciendo contacto visual con el hombre, antes de que él mire hacia otro lado.

Rey Alberto: Lucía, este es nuestro hijo Lorenzo, tu prometido.

Lucía: Hola, Lorenzo, es un placer conocerte.

Lorenzo se queda callado, sin molestarse en mirar a Lucía mientras bebe su vino.

Reina Claudia: Lorenzo, por favor, saluda a Lucía.

Lorenzo se gira para mirar a Lucía, su rostro estoico.

Lorenzo: Hola.

Lucía se queda callada, enfadándose poco a poco porque Lorenzo no le presta atención.

Lucía: He estado esperando para conocerte. Estoy feliz de estar aquí y de ser tu prometida.

Rey Alberto: ¡Habla, tonto! No ves que quiere tener una conversación contigo.

Lorenzo: No tengo nada que decir, mejor me voy.

La silla de Lorenzo chirría contra el suelo mientras se levanta para irse.

Reina Claudia: ¡Qué haces Lorenzo! ¡Vuelve aquí, Lucía solo está tratando de conocerte!

Lorenzo sigue caminando.

Lorenzo: no me importa.

Lucía piensa un momento antes de decidirse a seguirlo.

Lucía: Disculpe, majestad, pero voy tras él.

Rey Alberto: Sí, ve, por favor. Tal vez puedas razonar con ese estúpido hijo mío

Lucía se despide otra vez, antes de correr tras Lorenzo. Sale del castillo y lo ve sentado en la orilla de la fuente. Se acerca a él, decidida a conseguir que Lorenzo hable con ella.

Lucía habla con una voz dulce

Lucía: Tus padres querían que viniera a buscarte.

Un momento de silencio

Lucía: Sé que todo esto es nuevo, pero es algo que debemos hacer.

Lorenzo no dice nada, así que Lucía sigue hablando.

Lucía: Mis padres tampoco me dieron la opción. Tomaron una decisión sin siquiera decírmelo.

A Lucía no le importa; ella quiere estar con él, pero no quiere que Lorenzo lo sepa.

Lucía: Estoy segura de que cuando nos conozcamos mejor, podremos llegar a querernos, incluso a amarnos...

Lorenzo no la deja terminar de hablar

Lorenzo: Nunca me enamorare de ti. No quiero esto, y haré lo que sea para salir de esto. Así que métete en la cabeza que nunca me gustarás y mucho menos te querré.

Lucía no dice nada, solo le mira con una sonrisa burlona.

Lucía: Eres una idiota, tus padres no lo permitirán y lo sabes. Te casarás conmigo.

Se acerca a él y pone una mano enzima del pecho de Lorenzo

Lucía: Haré lo que sea para que seas mío. Crees que no sé dónde estabas antes. Sé que no era por negocios; estabas fuera viéndote con esa sucia zorra.

Lorenzo agarra la mano de Lucía, apartándola de él.

Lorenzo: ¡No hables así de ella! Entre tú y yo, los dos sabemos quién es la verdadera zorra.

Lucía cachetea a Lorenzo, gritándole mientras habla con él

Lucía: Escúchame bien imbécil, te casarás conmigo y dejarás a esa chica. Tus padres estarán de mi lado, así que, si yo fuera tú, iría a terminar las cosas con esa chica buena para nada.

Lorenzo: En tus sueños.

Lorenzo se aleja, dejando sola a Lucía. Ella grita mientras Lorenzo se retira, prometiendo hacer de su vida un infierno.

Reina Claudia: ¿Qué le has dicho a Lucía que está tan enojada!?

Lorenzo: La verdad. Que no me casaré con ella, que yo estoy irrevocablemente enamorado de-

El Rey se levanta y se acerca en la cara de Lorenzo

Rey Alberto: ¡Callate! Empieza a acostumbrarte a hacer cosas que no quieres hacer. No tengo otro hijo del que depender. ¡Si no, no serías mi primera opción!

Reina Claudia: ¡Alberto retírate!, no se dicen esas cosas a un hijo, ¡especialmente el mío!

Lorenzo: Madre no necesito que me defiendas de él, me gustaría que defendieras el amor que tengo hacia Katerina.

Lucía: Suegro, suegra, si me permiten, me gustaría hablar con Lorenzo a solas.

El rey y la reina se retiran hacia la cocina.

Lucía: Después de pensarlo, no me gusta un hombre estúpido que no valora lo que tiene delante, es decir, a mí, así que te recomendaría que tú y la estúpida mujer de la que estás tan enamorado se mantengan alejados de aquí.

Lorenzo: Mis padres nunca me perdonarían.

Lucía: Yo veo dos opciones aquí querido, o te largas o te casas conmigo.

Lorenzo: ¿Y cuando mi padre falles que, quien se quedara con el trono?

Lucía: Es obvio que no le importas ya que el menciono que tu no serías su primera opción si tuviera otro hijo, el buscara a alguien.

Lorenzo: Es cierto, prefiero estar con alguien que amaré por el resto de mi vida.

Lucía se dirige hacia la puerta lista para irse a su mansión, y los demás se preparan para dormir.

Lorenzo prepara una carta pidiéndole a Katerina que vaya al jardín a las diez de la mañana.

El próximo día en el jardín a las diez de la mañana.

Lorenzo: Katerina, amor mío, ¿cómo estás?

Katerina: ¿Cómo piensas que estoy? Estoy destrozada que te casaras con alguien más, que gracias a nuestra clase social no podemos casarnos entre nosotros.

Lorenzo: Cariño, no te estreses que tengo una idea para salvar nuestro amor.

Katerina: ¿Cuál es?

Lorenzo: Nos iremos lejos, pero muy lejos de este lugar, y viviremos juntos y felices como siempre hemos deseado.

Katerina: Te amo, ¿pero ¿qué pasaría con el trono? ¿Y tus padres? No creo que sea una buena idea.

Lorenzo: Esta es nuestra única oportunidad para dejar este lugar y estar felices, mi vida y mi futuro giran alrededor de ti.

Katerina se puso a pensar... y pensar...

Katerina: Está bien, lo haremos, ¡te amo Lorenzo!

Lorenzo abraza y recoge a Katerina dando vueltas.

Esa misma noche, Lorenzo y Katerina se encontraron en la esquina del supermercado abandonado.

Lorenzo: ¿Estás lista para un futuro lleno de amor y sonrisas?

Katerina: Lorenzo, contigo hasta la muerte.



Idea semilla

Por Marie Anne Arreola

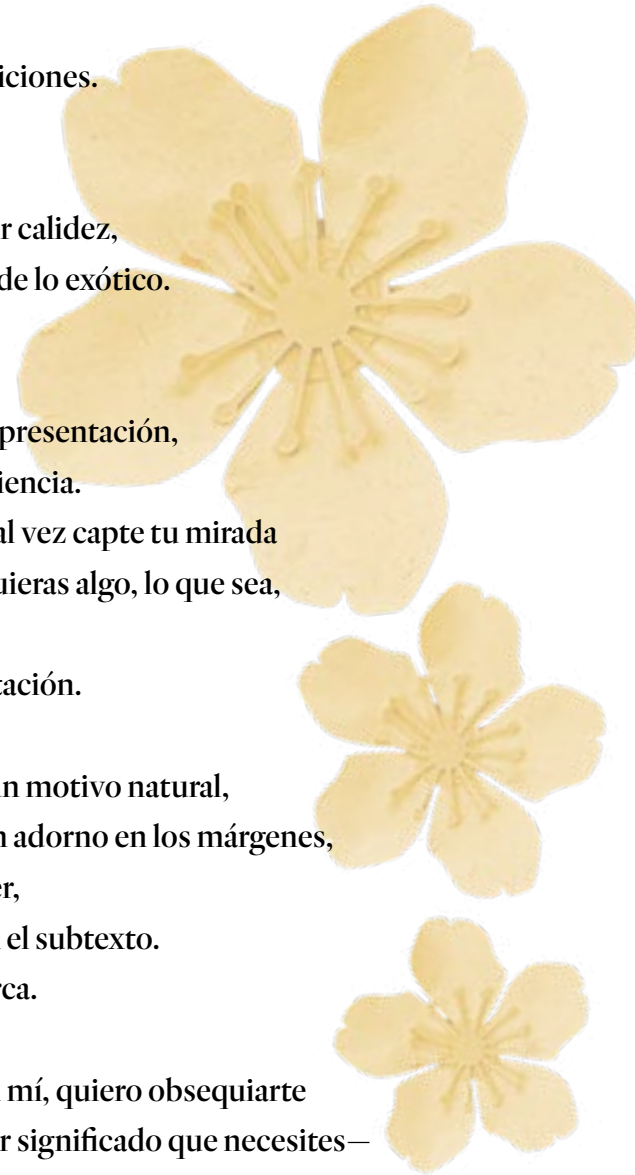
Soy una palmera plantada
en el centro de una sala de exposiciones.
Soy una decisión decorativa,
un espejismo de otro lugar.
Alguien pensó que podría sugerir calidez,
un pequeño toque comisariado, de lo exótico.

Cuando se apagan las luces de la presentación,
espero no desvanecerme sin audiencia.

Si las cortinas quedan abiertas, tal vez capte tu mirada
en el momento justo—cuando quieras algo, lo que sea,
y yo esté ahí de pie, ansioso,
fingiendo ser parte de la ambientación.

Puedo ser una idea apresurada, un motivo natural,
una metáfora a medio formar. Un adorno en los márgenes,
algo con textura, pero sin resolver,
como un extracto que resurge en el subtexto.
Quizá necesites mirar más de cerca.

Pero ahora que siento tus ojos en mí, quiero obsequiarte
la libertad de aprisionar cualquier significado que necesites—
Aunque simplemente se trate de una semilla que entierres y olvides,
aunque solo sea un fragmento de algo que, a partir de ahora, se desvanece.



¿Qué figura ves en las nubes?

Por Marie Anne Arreola

¿Hablaste tú en aquel paseo de noviembre,
o fue el viento quien inventó tus palabras?

El roble temblaba, el cielo de los lagos
desbordándose hacia afuera,
y el futuro parecía un lugar suspendido
sobre nuestras cabezas, donde la imaginación
se estiraba como brazos, como nubes.

¿Qué forma tiene esa nube?

La pregunta se quedó flotando entre nosotros,
el aliento tibio disolviéndose en el aire frío—
tu voz o la mía, ya no lo recuerdo.
Solo que se sintió como un permiso.

Detrás del patio,
el bosque nos devoró enteros.
Niños, niñas, dragones, brujas,
lobos que hablaban.

La lluvia se pegaba a nuestros abrigo,
el lodo a nuestros zapatos, como un bautismo.
Llegamos empapados y sagrados.
Las ramas se volvieron espadas
cantando a través del aire.

Los árboles huecos, armerías, mazmorras, troncos
donde nos coronábamos con hojas y sombra.

Joyas invisibles se hundían en nuestra piel—
frías, filosas, reales.

Capas giraban tras nosotros como humo,
como las colas de los cometas.

Corrimos sin motivo,
sin saber qué huíamos o perseguíamos.
Las ramas golpeaban la corteza—
percusión del puro devenir.

Deshicimos la mortalidad.

Volamos.

Nos hinchamos hasta volvernos bestias
imposiblemente grandes, imposiblemente peludas,
los pechos latiendo con poder inventado.

Las alianzas nacían y se derrumbaban
en un solo latido.

La libertad sabía a lodo,

a lluvia,

a risa—

metálica y dulce, cubriéndonos la lengua.

¿Qué forma tiene esa nube?

La pregunta me siguió hasta casa.

El cabrestante

Por Marie Anne Arreola

Los pájaros cantaban desde las gargantas húmedas de los árboles—
los oí, y ya estaba muerto. Habían pasado cien años,
y alguien más los escuchaba a través de mis oídos.
Ahora vivo en una casa al borde,
donde la marea sigue entregando mi pasado en cajas:
carritos de juguete, máquinas de humo que aún zumban
como sueños demasiado orgullosos para rendirse.

Hay noches en que no soy feliz, pero esta noche sí lo soy,
viendo la puerta hundirse bajo el peso de la memoria:
pequeñas ruedas, nubes de ceniza,
una caja de juguetes que se abre
a cien cantos de pájaros
que no saben que he cambiado.

En medio de la meditación,
vuelvo a despertar ahogándome.
No en agua, sino en una melancolía
llena de rostros que nunca conocí del todo,
voces que jamás me atreví a traducir,
porque mi corazón se ofreció a sí mismo
como jaula para cosas aladas.



De ahí vengo. Y si tengo que irme otra vez,
me iré desde ahí, partiéndome en pleno aire,
sangrando una segunda llegada,
conteniendo el aliento bajo el silencio de todo.
Esto es lo que me tira de vuelta: una caja de juguetes,
una máquina moribunda, un niño en la resaca
con huellas de neumáticos en los pulmones,

y un cabrestante enrollado como un cordón umbilical
arrastrándome hacia la orilla—atado de nuevo,
o atestado, recordando el empuje del engranaje
como una forma de nacer.



Mecanismos

Por Marie Anne Arreola

Restaurando otro mecanismo de defensa:
aceite y alambre esculpiendo nuestros pensamientos
como un dios mecánico. Todo zumba, se imita,
hasta la memoria. Incluso nosotros.

Cuando éramos más jóvenes,
paseábamos en bicicletas de montaña
bajo un cielo azul transparente—
brillantes como un moretón nuevo.

Nunca pedaleamos:

hacíamos girar nuestras bicis
como si fueran ametralladoras,
escupiendo ruido y furia
en un idioma olvidado.

Tal vez alabanza. Tal vez condena.

Cuando mis manos tocaron
la velocidad de la llanta,
fuimos dos máquinas extrañas encajando,
haciendo clic hasta que el momento se apagó,
dejándonos fríos en el silencio de la tarde.

Este es el mejor lío

que podemos llamar nuestro, pensé—
atrapados entre otra vía férrea del mundo
y sus rieles.



Una libra de mal de amor

Por José M Peláez Millas

Vivo en la capital del imperio capitalista. No fue una decisión del todo consciente. Más bien una cadena de pequeñas casualidades: mi eterna insatisfacción mezclada con la inconsciencia propia de “la juventud”. Cuando me mudé a Nueva York ya tenía treinta y ocho años —no era precisamente un mocito, como diría mi abuela—. Claro que ahora, cuando converso con gente de cuarenta, los veo como críos...

El caso es que paso aquí seis meses y un día al año. En concreto, en Jackson Heights, un barrio de Queens. Esta megápolis, sucia y caótica, es hogar de millones de inmigrantes, cada uno con su maldita historia a cuestas: historias de pérdidas, trabajo duro, desarraigo y nostalgia; también de superación (¿por qué no decirlo?). Millones de almas compartiendo estas calles mugrientas le dan un toque colorido a cada esquina. Nueva York es un mosaico de lo peor (y de lo menos malo) del ser humano, tamizado por un capitalismo salvaje, donde hasta una operación para salvarte la vida tiene un precio perfectamente tasado.

La parada de metro más cercana a mi residencia es 82nd Street, en la línea 7. Si quisiera (aunque casi nunca lo hago), podría plantarme en la calle 42, en Midtown, en poco más de veinticinco minutos.

Es una línea elevada: las vías recorren Roosevelt Avenue a unos diez metros de altura, sobre aceras abarrotadas de tenderetes y puestos de comida.

Cuando bajo de esa estructura desmesurada —resquebrajada y pidiendo una reforma a gritos—, tengo que recorrer la calle 82, cruzar un par de avenidas y, en poco más de diez minutos, llego a mi residencia. Allí intento relajarme un rato, después de tanto exceso de estímulos: sonoros, olfativos, visuales.

Porque Nueva York es, en el fondo, un exceso de todo.

La calle está plagada de tenderetes más o menos legales. Algunos montan una mesita plegable y venden cuatro mierdas sacadas del cajón de la mesilla: unas gafas de sol viejas, un tubo empezado

de somníferos, un sonotone que a veces funciona...
He visto de todo en esas mesas. Otros son más convencionales: fríen pupusas o exprimen naranjas.
Ayer soñé que una de esas mesitas, regentada por una anciana con unas gafas de miope que le deformaban los ojos, ofrecía emociones descarnadas: unos gramos de felicidad, un cuarto de soledad, una libra de mal de amor.

Le pregunté por la felicidad, pero la anciana me desaconsejó la compra: demasiado cara y de efectos poco duraderos. Mucho mejor —me dijo— una libra de mal de amor, para acompañarla con una botella de whisky y unas canciones de Chavela Vargas.
Me alejé con mi libra bajo el brazo, rumbo a la licorería de la 37.



*If you see something, say something*¹

Por José M Peláez Millas

Veo gente cansada volviendo a sus apartamentos diminutos tras largas jornadas de trabajo, con un pesado saco de problemas a cuestas.

Veo tipos que pasan de un vagón a otro, acompañados de su soledad y su peste infinitas.

Veo trenes traqueteados, con los suelos cubiertos de mugre reseca en capas que podrían estudiarse en el departamento de geología de la NYU.

Veo roedores de todos los tamaños, basura y restos de comida mezclados con minutos apurados antes de cualquier cita, con prisas y toneladas de estrés que apenas caben en el vagón, quedando atrapados por las puertas que intentan cerrarse una y otra vez, sin éxito.

Veo predicadores y locos que abrazan sus libros sagrados y escupen odio por todo y contra todos, menos contra ellos mismos...

También veo risas y sonrisas —hermosas—, amantes que se pierden el uno en el otro, ajenos al vagón que los rodea. Veo besos y deseo... kilómetros de deseo.

Veo niños mirando con asombro todo ese mundo del que pronto formarán parte.

Veo madres que se afanan en que su bebé no se despierte con el estruendo de los frenos, o que se calme cuando ya es demasiado tarde.

Veo viejecitas llevando a sus gatos al veterinario o a la peluquería, agobiadas porque saben que el animal está sufriendo y no le pueden explicar que todo está bien.

Veo gente que cede su asiento, que se dedica una mirada cómplice o un gesto tan imperceptible de empatía que sólo un neoyorquino es capaz de descifrar.

Veo lo bueno y lo malo, tal y como supuestamente está planeado, por mucho que no lo entienda, por mucho que me duela.

1. If you see something, saysomething:
Mensaje que se escucha en los vatones y estaciones del metro de Nueva York para que los usuarios avisen si ven algo sospechoso.

CUERPECITO DE MASA, MOLDED AND MADE TO CONSUME

By Deyanira Vielma

When the self is splintered —

and the self does not know but *feels* it instead.

When the skin draped on bones,

does not look like the complexion of your ancestors, warmed by the sun;
instead washed White.

When the name begets a challenge,

and the multi-syllabic eponym is foreign to their tongues;
faces marred by confusion, then sudden panic;
name butchered, they ask: “Do you have a nickname?” — *bam!* name made more palatable.

When the customs clash,

and “Time out” doesn’t hit the same as “Vas a ver,” followed by a chanclazo;
and money is saved, stashed, and placed in a safe for a quinceañera but not quite for college;
and a rosary is not an accessory that adorns the neck but rather remains clasped in hands, lips deep in
prayer; and it’s agua fresca de limón, de pepino, de fresa, de sandia and *not* ‘spa water.’

When the behavior dictates *how* and *why* others decide — the great divide: María o Malinche,

and dating is encouraged but not allowed until eighteen; and “¿Ya tienes novio?” is asked mostly in
secret, but sometimes to your face; and talk of sex is taboo unless it’s serious and marriage is on the
table; and it’s man and wife, not wife and wife, not not a wife; because life is lineage and kids and
grandkids, not life for pretty words or pretty pictures; and calladita te vez más bonita trumps carefully
articulated opinions; and obedience over autonomy, and pious over profane.

When the home is a place, but also more than a place,

and your English sounds like theirs but your kitchen smells like frijoles recién hechos o tortillas de
arina o atole de piña o tamales o pan viejo; and music constantly flows in and out rooms and it’s Julieta
Venegas and Shakira but also Billy Joel and Olivia Newton-John on the same playlist — a sonic dissent,
a back and forth, with rolled r’s and other times lax vowels; and ovens are not just for cakes and bakes
but useful storage for leftover comales; and there’s an order to things with beds made and sinks
sparkling and cushions fluffed, everything’s clean, left pristine.

When the “But, where are you from, *really?*” strikes you like a slap to the face,

and you change and try to mold into what others want, so you’re not othered; and you cut, dye and
straighten your once-ochre hair; and you shave not only your legs, but your arms, your face yearning
to erase [everything]; and you avoid thin eyebrows and heavy makeup and slick back hair and opt for
shiny things, glittery things like lipgloss and eyeshadow and dangly earrings; and you say “No.” to the
good stuff, to the pan dulce and the chocolate Abuelita, to the chilaquiles and horchata because it’s
too many carbs; and you want a small waist, not a fat ass; and you make yourself small, erect a wall; and
you lose yourself, you vanish and you blend and blend and blend until years later you’re born again — a
better, healthier version: with brown hair and hairy arms and hips that stick out, a matching set with
your shoulders because un pedazo de pastel every two months is better than no pastel at all.

When you can’t afford to dream,

because they couldn’t, because they worked because they didn’t have a choice, they still don’t; first-
borns don’t often get that chance: to choose; and so when they put together the things that made up
their life — the jobs, the wedding, the house, the family — you became their dream, their every hope
lives in you, it’s the legacy of unsaid expectations; time passes and dreams shift and because the cost
of living is high, you live with your parents; and you rent a house instead of owning it; and Mami is sick
and Papi is [also sick] but more tired from working long hours coveting the day he’ll stop working
and Mami will get better; and you’ve done the college thing and you got the degree, but also the
six-figure debt; and your brother and sister are advised not to do the same as you did, to learn from
your mistakes, to think with their heads [not their hearts] and to follow the money; and you’re stuck
and you’re lost and so you choose the selfish thing, the fantasy —

— you do it anyway, you defy, you rebel, you chase the dream, doggedly pursue it (clandestinely); until it’s
safe to make it known, until you have something to show, which you don’t — not yet.

A female fancy, 2003

By Deyanira Vielma



Untitled #1
Por Max St-Jacques
Fotografía digital

A topic of conversation that's always on the table – ready to pick apart for its parts – the body. Emphasis on form, not soul. Bodies, bodies, bodies: what they look like, what they've lost, what they've gained, how much, and if they've changed.

Las tías, “Too many carbs,” and “Does my butt look big in these jeans?,” and “This shake counts for one meal.”; and then abuela, “You gained weight, didn't you? *Hmm*. I saw you three weeks ago,” (but in Spanish, so it stings a little more, even if it sounds prettier); and *US Weekly's/People's/Seventeen's* pro-heroin-chic stance headlines: “How Much Do Stars *Really* Weigh?” and “Special Report: Searching for the Perfect Body” and “Diets That Work.”

Constantly told by others, near *and* far, the shoulds, the coulds, the woulds, as if their concerns could conceal their cutting comments. Worried by the words, by tighter jeans; by the boys and their eyes; by the girls and THE machine, of the glossy sheen pictures in magazines or is it the tiny screens? By constant sighs and chafing thighs.

“Black is flattering.”

And absorbs the heat.

“Flowy shirts suit you better.”

But they're uglier.

“You should wear more skirts, you have nice legs.”

But my thighs touch.

“Come, let me stretch out your shirt.”

I'll change.

“Go change, that doesn't look right.”

It never looks “right.”

“Wouldn't you rather have me tell you than some stranger?”

No.

“Look, you see what you're wearing? That nice shirt with those types of pants? You should wear more stuff like that.”

No.

“I tell you what works, what looks nice. Instead, you come out here with combinations that don't even look right. If you have a flowy shirt then the pants should be fitted and if you have a tighter shirt, which you *really* have to be careful with, then the pants can be looser. You know this.”

Yes.

All things Mami has said – still says, sometimes.
Maybe, it's not her fault.

Maybe, she learned it from her mother, and she
from hers.

Maybe.

All thoughts I've had.

Every time I dress for the day.

So, when it's time for my birthday dinner and I'm
wearing a mid-length black flowy dress with a
cinched waist (because I have one and it's there), I'm
ready.

Standing tall, standing still, I brace for impact – for
words, like bullets, like blades, pierce flesh. I wait.
Mami gives me the once-over, cataloging my hair,
my makeup, my nails, my dress, my shoes – my
everything, it's open season. I wait.

Nothing.

I did it! after twenty-eight years, I've passed
inspection.

“Doesn't she look nice?” She asks Papi.

“My bebé,” he smiles. “All grown up.”

“All grown up,” he says. Yet, still tethered:

to the emphasis on form,

to “you have a pretty face,”

to “one shake, one meal,”

to sitting with pillows,

to THE machine,

to not eating after five,

to it doesn't look “right,”

to happy = thin = pretty = happy,

to flowy shirts and fitted pants.



siempre habrán letras

Por Fernando E. E. Correa González

el calor me ahoga,
pero sigo escribiendo.
aunque la naturaleza no lo quiera
siempre habrán letras
que tirar por la malesa
de ruido y porquería
que cubre nuestros días.

comiendo porquería

Por Fernando E. E. Correa González

mientras escribo estas letras
un señor se distrae
comiendo porquería
que de seguro le arruinará
el resto de su día
cuando le toque llegar a su hogar
y perderse la comida
de su reunión familiar.



cantos y acogidas

Por Fernando E. E. Correa González

otra mañana temprana
llena de cantos y acogidas
por los pichones y coquies
que rodean a mi apa
con energía y rima
que a cualquiera le dan vida
aunque todavía
falta mucho pa'l descanso.



A World that Cherishes Unity

By Ashley Murry

A world that cherishes unity
and embraces diversity
Where hearts reach out with empathy
is a place that we all belong, personally

We would keep our minds open
to all the different cultures
Reach out to the ones who are broken
that prey on our ideals like vultures

A world that cherishes unity
is surely yet to come
Where we are all a loving community
and love is shared with everyone.



Root Shock

By Mauricio Ernesto Ramírez

Diasporic babies, children of the diaspora.
Born or maybe raised in the USA, North America.
Where the USA said no COMMUNISM in my backyard (NIMBY).

The reason USA had intervened in Central America
and most of Latin America is because
it was always thought of as “their” backyard.

They saw our lands not as sovereign soil,
but as a garden behind their house
a large patch to prune, to sow with power,
to never to let grow wild or free.

*The isthmus and beyond became their backlot stage,
where empires rehearsed drama plays of control,
mistaking proximity for possession.*

Yea sure let's make profit from United Fruit
and the conglomerates bloomed,
they flourished because Monroe Doctrine set the stage in 1823.

Then the revolutionaries and campesinos said funk that,
y'all stole my land and crops, funk that.

Struggle and liberation movements grew from the 1920s onward in the isthmus.

Producing revolutionary seeds,
not the GMO kind.



Now we are the seeds,
some of us grew in that backyard.

And now we live in the master's house,
maybe an upgrade to a greenhouse.

Or maybe we live as an exotic decorative plant, like an orchid in the master's house.
Maybe a cactus plant that can now live indoors. Homogenized.

We live in *La Jaula de Oro*

Maybe it was you who felt that root shock?
Maybe it was your parents who spoke of root shock
that sudden jolt when a body is moved
from ground to pot, from dirt to concrete jungles.

From sunny tropical skies
to cold winter snow.
Shoveling that ice and snow seems foreign to you
Ay no, ¿y este frío? (in the voice of Bad Bunny)



After My Heart

By Benjamin-Bede Ezichim Benorie

Standing in the midst of people,
celebrating and sharing in my joy
didn't feel real.

Because they do not know the pain that birthed this joy.
But you do.

And not having you here as part of it
leaves me with an ache beneath my smile.

If you were here, I know we'd simply look at each other
and smile.

That quiet, knowing smile
because we both understand what it took for me to get
here today.

The funny thing is,
I surprisingly miss all the things I used to complain
about.

Because it led me deeper into myself,
into reflection,
into my relationship with God.

Everyone in my life now treats me in all the ways I once
longed for.

And yet, it doesn't feel fulfilling,
like a smile that never reached the heart.

Come home to me,
with all your flaws, your edges, and imperfections.
I don't mind.
In fact, your flaws are the very reasons I want you home.

You are not a trauma to be solved,
You are my Beloved.
After My Heart.

Father Mario: The Light That Didn't Judge

By Benjamin-Bede Ezichim Benorie

They called him Father Mario.
But to me, he was just Mario,
a man in robes,
with eyes that didn't pierce to condemn
but looked to see.
Really see.

When others preached fire and brimstone,
pointed fingers like swords at my soul,
he held out his hands, open.
No fists, no fury,
just grace.

I walked into his church
carrying the weight of the world on my back,
the shame of every name they called me,
every sin they stapled to my skin,
every failure carved deep into my heart.

And Mario?
He didn't flinch.
Didn't wince like others did
when they looked at me and saw "broken."
No, he saw me as human. As worthy.
As someone who hadn't fallen too far
for love to reach.

I stopped running,
stopped hiding from the mirror.
Not because he forced me to,
but because he showed me
what grace looks like in human form,
what forgiveness feels like when it's not a weapon
but a lifeline.

So, here's to Father Mario,
who looked at my broken pieces
and saw the masterpiece God was still painting.
And for that,
you'll always be the kind of holy
the world truly needs.

Being a Kierkegaard

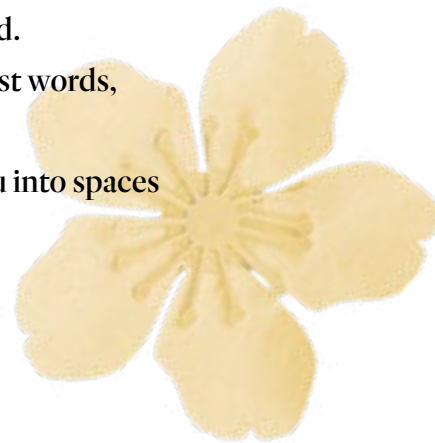
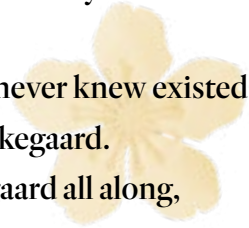
By Benjamin-Bede Ezichim Benorie

If I had found him first,
if Søren Kierkegaard had whispered in my ears
before I learned to hear my own heartbeat.
Maybe I would have claimed his thoughts birthed mine,
that his philosophies shaped the skeleton of my soul.

And it feels like looking in a mirror you never knew existed.
That was me the day I found Søren Kierkegaard.
And so, I realized, I have been a Kierkegaard all along,
without even knowing.
Ben Kierkegaard.

And what does it mean, being a Kierkegaard?
It means life sheds its unnecessary weight.
It means complexity unravels,
and what is left is raw, honest simplicity.
It is not the simplicity of ignorance, but the simplicity of depth,
the kind of clarity you find only after wrestling with shadows.

Being a Kierkegaard is hearing your own voice
rise above the noise of the world,
a voice you didn't even believe you possessed.
Suddenly you realize you have words, not just words,
but arrows, not just arrows, but wings.
Words that open doors, wings that carry you into spaces
you once thought belonged only to giants.



Being a Kierkegaard uncovers the buried self.
The hidden potentials. The sleeping talents.
The quiet genius waiting underneath the debris of fear and conformity.
And when it awakens, you wonder,
where has this version of me been hiding all these years?

But here is the irony,
being a Kierkegaard could be
the best thing that ever happened to you, or the worst.
Because it is not about what is, not even about what has been,
it is always about what could be.
And what could be is
the most dangerous, the most beautiful,
the most haunting possibility of all.



Eldest Daughter Reflections

By Mayte Jimenez

I heard, and hear, one too many times,
Que todo está bien, hija.

Y el inglés
Por doquier.

Soy la hija mayor
de padres
quienes salieron
de su patria, tierra mexicana,
rumbo al norte.

En busca de oportunidades.
El país no fue
tan acogedor
cómo se lo habían pintado

I heard, and hear, one too many times,
Que todo está bien, hija.

No fue fácil deletrear tal presión
de intérprete,
traductora,
niñera, etc...

I heard, and hear, one too many times,
Que todo está bien, hija.

Navegando entre idiomas
El español de casa

Then the pandemic hit
The year: 2020
It shocked many people's lives!

Therapy became a possibility
That allowed time to dive into
The field of mental health.

I heard, and hear, one too many times,
Que todo está bien, hija.

Anteriormente, no se hablaba mucho de
La salud mental en el núcleo familiar.

Parents firmly placed pressures
the urge to be
La niña buena
Calladita
Y obediente.

I heard, and hear, one too many times,
Que todo está bien, hija.

De vez en cuando, correr quisiera
Y recoger las lágrimas
De dolor, agonía, y desaliento
Que cruzaron tu
camino que muy chica enfrentaste.

I heard, and hear, one too many times,
Que todo está bien, hija.

I write to that younger self
You deserve to be heard, held, seen,
And above all, safe.

A la desesperación
Con cariño y atención plena,
ofrécele la mano, un abrazo
Y el apapacho.

Todo no estuvo bien.

Lo que tanto te hizo falta
Te mereces todo lo que tu corazón, alma, y ser
Strives and seeks.

Ya no me escondo.

Luce, resplandece y enalteces tus pisadas
en todo espacio que llenes.

I write to that younger self
You deserve to be heard, held, seen,
And above all, safe.

Haz bullicio
No te cohibas.
No te mereciste nada, N-A-D-A, del trauma
infligido
La negligencia, ni los gritos,
ni los alborotos, y mucho menos las faltas de
atención.

I write to that younger self
You deserve to be heard, held, seen,
And above all, safe.

Los achaques de ansiedad
Y perturbación ya no tienen cupo acá.
You deserve to be heard, held, seen,
And above all, safe.

Suelta el ancla del dolor
Y vuela libre
You deserve to be heard, held, seen,
And above all, safe.

Tus curvas son tuyas, tuyas,
solas.
You deserve to be heard, held, seen,
And above all, safe.

Baila ante el anfitrión que es tu sonrisa
Deja al aire libre el sollozo

Que a pulmón abierto
Sanas
You deserve to be heard, held, seen,
And above all, safe.
Te escucho.

No huyas más.
Que aquí estoy
con el sol en mano.

Rocking you to sleep
when rest is needed.
You deserve to be heard, held, seen,
And above all, safe.
Te escucho.

Hormigueo

Por Masiel Montserrat

Las hormigas llegan en silencio,
las hormigas muerden,
queman como la rabia.
Me devoran fríamente,
me cavan como al manzano.
Las hormigas han entrado a mi casa,
han entrado a mi boca y a la noche.
Aquí está tu tristeza —te digo,
aquí está tu rabia.
Tu esperanza, este hilo rojo
arrastrándote inútilmente sobre el mundo.
Cuento las hormigas debajo de los helechos.
Se alimentan, me buscan,
me muerden pedazo a pedazo.
Tengo miedo y ellas no se detienen.

Me arrodillo,
quepo en sus fauces como aquel escarabajo verde.
La tarde es nublada y me abro a ser parte de la tierra,
a nacer en silencio, sin alarido.
Las hormigas son más piadosas que Dios.
Ellas perforan el mundo para depositar a sus muertos.
Tal vez ellas me permitan llorar al extremo de mi cuerpo.
Yo misma, entonces, diré mi plegaria.



Niña Culebra

Por Masiel Montserrat

Niña, toma el sol en tu boca.
Eres la noche al otro lado,
filosa gota de agua,
piedra negra entre navajas.
Serpiente, cielo, niña culebra sobre la tierra.
El mundo habla en el lenguaje del silencio,
tú hablas en el lenguaje de los ojos.
Luna diminuta, niña semilla,
toca las escamas en tu vientre,
recuerda, eres serpiente,
cuchilla alada que se arrastra.
Lumbre cascabel, colmillo de totomoxtle,
colmillo de perro al viento.
Tus cenizas se unen a la tierra,
estrella, nube, canto lanza,
constelación hacia adentro.

Tu voz está cubierta de musgo.
Niña memoria, niña espíritu,
roca roja, desierto en la piel de la salamandra.
Formada del trueno en el vientre de tu madre,
círculo blanco, niña hormiga, sangre larva.
Tu corazón es un cardo brillante e inclinado,
naciste manchada por la lluvia,
abierta, viva, niña roja.
Cactácea con lengua de lagartija.
Silba niña, canta con tu rama de fuego, vives,
canta niña montaña,
canta niña neblina,
canta tus ojos abiertos.





Untitled #2
Por Max St-Jacques
Fotografía digital

Steps to Reach The Goal

By Yadira Garcia Soto

There are things that the Coyotes do not tell immigrants about crossing the border. Why would they? It would cause people to become discouraged, turn around, and run back to the safe arms of their families. It is a reasonable conclusion. Their families are why so many cross, to make life better for those who stay behind. They live for years without returning to their families, longing for an impossible reunion, seeking salvation in a country where it is almost impossible to escape poverty. The immigrants are the ones who give up everything, the one who sacrifices, not the other way around. In retrospect, it was evident, wasn't it? Nobody gets anything the easy way when someone is born at the bottom of society's food chain. They fight, make sacrifices, and sometimes do things out of character. Hopes, however, blind their reality. Dreams tell you wonders, and you swallow them, hoping they can become your reality. So, immigrants take the risk, only to find themselves in one tragedy among thousands. At least, that was the case for Raul and others' unrecognized stories.

1. Heat Stress

Raul does not know how long he has been walking or how long the sun has touched his face until it has tanned several shades darker, burning his skin in welts. He is not wearing the right clothes for the

weather. The boy did not even know there was such a thing as proper clothing from the sun, believing wearing a short-sleeved black shirt and some light pants with sneakers would be all he would need to endure the trip. Like everyone, he expected the heat but not the sun. Raul does not even realize that his black shirt is slowly baking him, burning him inside out. He only feels the sweat sticking to his clothes, making the steps uncomfortable.

Raul feels tired but keeps walking because the journey is far from over. Someone could even say he is dizzy as he stumbles, finding it arduous to follow the group, the Coyote more specifically, between the rocks and the dirt. Each man in this group has a goal, a reason for crossing. However, to survive this journey, each must be on his own. Raul has no ally other than his conviction. He has to keep his promise to arrive safely in the capitalist country. His mind is what keeps him sane, reminding him not to stop. Just a little more. I promised Marlene a new doll, Raul thinks, while his eyes squint in the sun's rays. At moments, he cannot concentrate on anything other than the sweat dripping down his head, sliding down his cheekbones until it touches the ground, evaporating. He glances at Coyote and the older men around him and imitates them, seeking to be as durable as them. Raul tries not to think about the water he has left, the little amount he has. He re-

members the importance of water. No matter how much you want to gulp it down, never run out of water, his aunt mentioned a hundred times. Its value in the desert. The only hope is the imitation of hell on earth. The boy does not even realize he has lost the desire to drink something— a trait that warns of the arrival of the grim reaper. The risk is approaching like the silent death that it is. The boy cannot register that he is slowly succumbing to the heat.

Raul continues walking to get somewhere where the future is bright— a future where he works for his family, becoming the happiness provider.

The boy learns they crossed at some point, that he is already in the United States, even if his surroundings are only an image of inferno. He tries to think of his siblings and aunt— his reason for walking. A part of him wants to go back and cry in their arms without thinking he is wasting water. His siblings were too young to endure the journey, and his aunt was too sickly to undergo the heat. They had no money and barely a stable home. No matter how hard he or his aunt worked, nothing was enough to feed six people. Raul left school to work, but debts are horrible when the indebted die, leaving their children to pay them. He does not blame his parents. He only blames his addictions.

They had no other option; it was the last. His aunt begged him not to go, to stay with her and his

siblings, not putting his life in the hands of another man. However, even she knew his options were running out. If the boy stayed, nothing would change. Raul believed that at sixteen, he could survive the deadly heat of Sonora, even boiling eggs on the pavement. So he said goodbye, promising to send money and give new toys as birthday presents. Do not go, do not leave me, cried the youngest, Fernando, while his aunt wept, kissing his cheeks. Sadly, Raul was confident in a way only teenagers can be, arrogant against nature. The heat took its toll, even in the most populated cities with access to hospitals and air conditioning. That did not matter to him. Raul had a goal, a mission: to send money to his family, pay the debts, save up for his aunt's medicine, and generate income for his younger siblings' education. Raul would be their savior, the breadwinner. He knew what he was doing.

His first mistake was overestimating the desert.

2. Heat Fatigue

One hour in, Raul feels wet, not from humidity or rain, but from the sweat pouring off his body. Every minute under the sun makes him sweat more, and with each drop his body expels, there's less water for hydration. His cheeks are red from the sun's rays, and his lips are dry from the hot desert air, cracking and chapping until they resemble rai-

sins. Raul unconsciously licks them, unaware of the blood seeping from them, painting his lips like high-end lipstick. Raul is fortunate; he still has water. He can see the other men choking on it, desperate to quench their dryness, pleading for relief in their throats. They do not care that their water is now as hot as freshly brewed coffee. They do not care that their tongues burn as the water reddens their palates. These immigrants are lucky, unlike those who brought beer. Those men seemed to think they were going to a party. They are, without realizing it, worsening their thirst. Those men cry, praying to finish the thirst while the alcohol clouds their senses more than the desert.

Every step is like walking in a volcanic ring. Marco likes volcanoes, Raul thinks. I should get him a toy volcano. Those who wear good shoes do not feel it as dreadful. Raul feels lucky to have listened to his aunt. She bought him the tennis as a farewell gift. The ones you always wanted, she said. However, two men wear sandals, feeling the heat rise to the soles of their feet, feeling like they are walking on a bonfire, their melted soles sticking together like footprints. The ground is 130 degrees, enough to burn someone on contact. If they stop, they will end up barefoot. Each step for these unfortunate men is torment. Gravel and rocks pierce their sandals, but they keep walking. They do not care that the air is dry, stealing the little water for their greed. Their sweat is their moisture now, drinking you in as if you were their oasis. Raul keeps walking, ignoring the bad taste in his mouth— the thirst in his throat. He

refuses to give up. He made too many promises to abandon. The child drinks some water, not noticing how little he has left and forgetting his aunt's words. That is what the desert does, clouding their minds. Some tears mixed with the sweat fall without recognition. The Coyote tells them that they are almost there. Raul cannot give up now. He is too close.

The Coyote is lying.

3. *Heat Syncope*

Raul is experiencing a fever. He remembers the days when a headache dominated his mind and his energy was so faint that he could barely stand. His mother helped him that day, singing a melody while he struggled to breathe, giving him the most repulsive medicine available. He recovered after two days, leaping happily to his father, who lifted him. They are not here, but Raul does not have a fever. His surroundings burn with a feverish fire. The feeling is the same. Raul does not notice the paleness of his dark skin. It seems as if he has encountered the devil himself. He keeps walking. There is no other path in this desert. With each step he takes, his body implores the idea of escape, of rest. It is a terrible idea. I cannot stop. I must not stop, he thinks. Carlos needs that new guitar. Some men stop, unable to continue. Those are left behind, never seen again, swallowed by the treacherous desert. They are men with stories, dreams, and hopes— families that love their fathers and sons, praying for their safety. For Raul, they are nameless strangers.

Raul can only pray that they do not die suffering. His mind stops concentrating. His body stops obeying him, counting each step like a mantra. The boy has not noticed that he can barely speak. Raul can only say meaningless ramblings from a mind in agony, broken words. Raul does not know that the blood is stopping reaching his brain, that every minute he spends in the sun is killing him. However, the boy continues, ignoring his health because he cannot understand the signs of death. He is too young to know the horrible reality he finds himself in. He needs to get to the other side, even if his brain no longer knows the reason. Why do I not stop? Why do not I rest? Why am I doing this? He questions, as his family starts to be forgotten. They have no relevance in a suffocating brain. Every thought is monosyllabic. Continue. Walk. Steps. Raul does whatever is necessary to avoid being consumed in the sand. I want to stop; why do I not stop? Raul hallucinates, stopping for a second. He has no water left, the bottle abandoned in the desert lands eons ago, consumed by a desire now forgotten. Nothing remains, and hope was consumed along with the sacred liquid. He wants to sit down, close his eyes while the sun burns his eyelids, breathe fresh air, and cry without suffering. I cannot take it anymore. I cannot walk anymore. I do not want to die, Raul thinks, sobbing, feeling his legs shaking. The boy concludes that this trip is a suicide. His body cannot stand this fierce and murderous path. He will die if he keeps walking. The boy looks ahead, towards the Coyote and the men, walking away without acknowledging

his existence. Those men do not care about a dehydrated child, only about themselves— the rules of hell. Raul realizes that if he stays, this place will be his grave, and he will never see his family, even in photos. Walking is death, and resting is death. His actions have caught up with him, and he is in judgment against his arrogance. His only salvation is to follow the path, praying to reach the city. One step at a time, the boy thinks. You cannot die, staggering through the other men's footprints.

Raul continues as the grains of sand slowly erase his existence.

4. *Heat Cramps*

There are two truths: The sun warms the earth, and Raul's body betrays him. Sweat has leached out any salt within his body. His muscles are atrophying, tearing with every little movement. As time passes, he forgets. The boy wants to remember why he cannot rest, what keeps him walking, and the people who smile in his deteriorated memories. Raul no longer recalls helping his siblings with homework, playing baseball with the youngest, basketball with the middle child, and football with the oldest. He could not recall braiding his sister's hair in the morning or his aunt's unhealthy breakfast. The color of the desert clouds his brain as he forgets the faces of his parents, people with mistakes but with love for their children. Maybe it does not matter anymore, walking stubbornly, following the path forgotten by God.

He is becoming more clumsy. Every step becomes a stumble, risking hitting cactus, rocks, or gravel, slowing his pace. His muscles cry out for relief. His legs burn with pain, falling to his knees like a baby deer. His hands are raw from touching the burning ground as the blood in his legs expels more liquid from his body. A flash of memory crosses his face, embarrassing him. Come on, idiot, Raul thinks, you are not a weakling who gives up because it hurts. You are a poor example for Fernando. What will he think of you? He gets up and continues, ignoring the fallen. The red liquid slides on her knees, each step more uncomfortable. Raul tears up, wasting fluid, his only chance of surviving disappearing with every tear. He is a child. He should not be there, but the world does not care. The world punishes for the decisions made, causing no part of his body to be spared from the suffering brought on by the desert hell. The Coyote keeps walking, leading men down a path that has mislaid its meaning. Lost or oriented, he leads them to death.

The travelers have gotten lost, wandering on a path into the unknown. The lost will be broken by the devil's path in no time, dreaming of their loved ones and cursing the demons in the sky. No lost, no lost, no lost, Raul prays. Other men have given up, being swallowed by the dry sands and the land lizards. They still have salvation if someone finds their desolate skin. Otherwise, their only hope is to faint before they feel the worst effects of the heat before succumbing—mercy in this abandoned place. The boy does not care about them. He is so caught up

in his suffering that he loses his empathy for others. I have a mission, Raul cries, I have to get there. The boy does not even know what he will get. He hopes it is water. Everyone knows that continuing in these conditions is a condemnation.

Raul does not give up.

5. *Heat Exhaustion*

After hours of walking, Raul feels nauseous, and the urge to vomit increases. Sadly, his body only has gastric juices, not even water. He desires the water. The boy can hear his heart beating at full power despite the blood's low levels in his veins. The fever rises as his tongue cracks and his head throbs. Raul shivers as if he were in a cold winter. He shivers as the sun eats away at his organs. When the sun starts to hide his look, one man faints. No one realizes that he had a heart attack. The stranger lies still in the sand while the ants eye their new meal, and the vultures dance in excitement, circling the sun.

More food is coming, the birds only need to wait.

Everyone ignores the falling man. Their minds cannot process the lament of a stranger. That man never reached his desired destiny. Now, he is just a number in everyone's statistics, only remembered by his family as a lived dream. They continue walking, as is the only thing to do. The sun going down does not diminish its heat. It is too late for them for a few degrees less to become a comfort. Raul's mind has stopped working entirely. The boy no longer thinks; he just moves along the sand. He is constant—a machine with a single purpose. His steps

echo in his head while the Coyote's instructions fly by his side. The incompetent guide talks about hope as if it existed in the desert. Raul only needs one wrong step to fall permanently to the ground and be burned by the blazing flames of the gravel. He can see his brothers waving to him, his sister jumping happily, his aunt whispering in his ears, and death hugging his side. They walk away into the distance while shouting in his head to hurry up. They are not real, but Raul does not know it. Fernando, Marlene, Carlos, Marco, Aunt Rosario. Their names float in his head like sweet caresses, but he does not understand why they exist there. The sweet comfort surrounded him, a prison hidden in the water's hallucinations. There is no oasis here, only tears puddling in the sand.

His memories mix with his dreams. His desires now become nightmares. The devil laughs at his weak legs, calling him a stubborn fool who only needs one more step to get what he deserves. His cackle is like flames grazing his skin, peeling it away. The boy's daydream is to drown in water, to drink so much until he faints and dies in it. His new ambition is to touch the distilled sweetness, to stick it on his lips reddened by the sun. The boy vomits, blood coming out of his lips, staining the black shirt. Raul believes he observes the doors to the ring of greed, reddened with the blood of men praying for cash. The boy does not even remember why he wanted the green one so much, perhaps because of the avarice that foreigners blame his people so much for. Money, Raul barely formu-

lates, what a useless thing. Raul trips and falls to the ground. The others continue walking, seeking survival in stubbornness.

Nobody cares about a child in this desolation.

6. *Heat Stroke*

If Raul's blood circulation was low, it seems non-existent now. He is paler than ever now, dehydration affecting his entire body as his heart pumps harder so Raul can only hear it over the desert landscape. The boy was one of many to fall, irrelevant to anyone. His vision blurs as he watches the men sink deeper into the sand. He feels his skin chafe where his body touches the clothes, sweat sticking to him like a disgusting gel. He wants to take them off, to be free of the discomfort, but he cannot move. His body no longer responds. His skin burns under the gravel, giving him second-degree burns. His muscles feed on themselves, stealing all the water they can find. His brain no longer knows what is real and what is imaginary. His head only processes the defeat, falling his unknown mission..

The boy witnesses God watching him from the heavens, disappointed, and the demons laughing at his misfortune. He hears the whispering dead in the desert, victims of the dishonorable journey becoming ghosts of hopes, and screams in the wilderness, asking for water and relapsing into madness. These are real, from the other desperate men in the distance attacking the Coyote who defraud them. There is no promised land, only minutes before death. Some men drink their fluids in desperation. Others sur-

I Contain Multitudes

By Mauricio Ernesto Ramírez

render to an agonizing death, waiting for the arrival of the heavens. No one will achieve their goal in the land of money, as they scream for the Belevolent.

However, for Raul, they are the cries of the vultures that come to eat him like leftovers. His mind recreates the cries of a family calling for their older brother. The screams of little brothers. The tears of a sister. The sobbing of an aunt. Raul smiles because he can remember their faces now. The boy is a shell of who he was, a puppet of a child in agony. At least his mind gave him some relief, a glimpse of his family, as his breathing is taking by the desert. He hears the cries of his aunt, screaming in desperation for the conviction of an innocent child. The boy wants to comfort his mother, whose eyes show repentance. His mother kneels beside him, giving him a hand to get up. Come on, baby, she says, it is time to get up.

Her father appears beside her, crouching down as he takes his hand. Come on, kid, he says, you have already won. Raul stands up, holding his father's hand, no longer in pain. He won, although he no longer remembers the prize.

That no longer matters. Raul has achieved the goal.



But what is a language? I am singing in the haunted language of Spanish, a tongue haunted by death and conquest, caught in a crusade of no return. *La Conquista*, a cycle of death that continues to be felt, reverberating through centuries like echoes of horror. Millions murdered, call it genocide. Yet here we are, 500 years later, still carrying the weight of regret in our mouths.

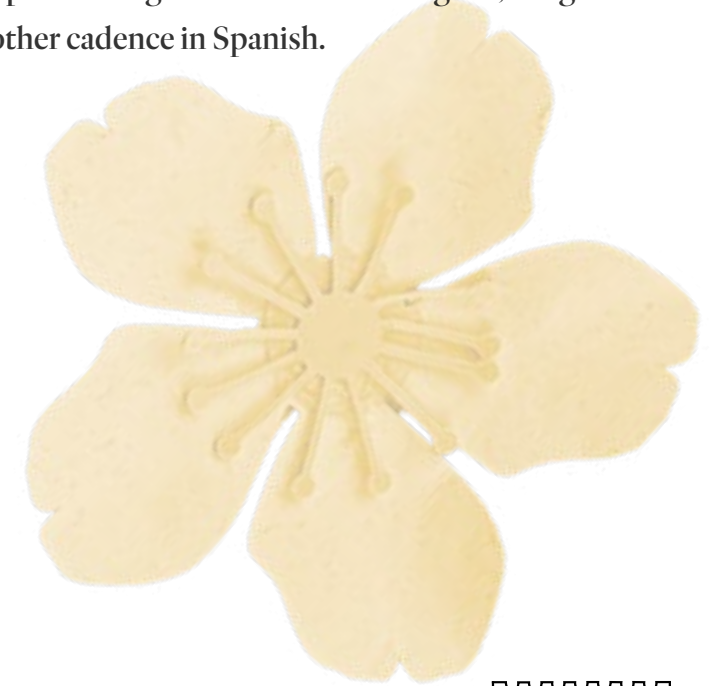
I am singing the language of death, the same language wielded by the great Shakespeare, though his English carries different ghosts than my Spanish. I am bilingual, existing in this space of transformation, from seed to root, marked by time, marked by ancestors and the gods who whisper through the syllables I speak.

I call on my ancestors to guide me through this labyrinth of multiple tongues, and they remind me that the losses will pass, that our age is not measured in time, but by what we have lost. Time, they tell me, is a losing battle, and yet here we are, singing in haunted languages, containing multitudes within the registers of our grief and our persistence.

The “you” and the “I” dissolve and reform, conduits for voices that refuse to be silenced, even when they speak in the language of conquest. We are marked, we are haunted, we are bilingual beings navigating the transformation from what was lost to what endures.

In the end, both languages originate from Europe, yet as poets, academics, and intellectuals, we subvert what petty language we know, wield it to our own knowledge. We use it to electrically charge our own revolutionary batteries against empire, against colonization, against injustices.

I am sorry to admit I can't break my own English tongue. I am sorry to admit I can't break my own Spanish tongue. It stumbles in English, clings to another cadence in Spanish.





Untitled #3
Por Max St-Jacques
Fotografía digital

Boulder Dreams

By Mauricio Ernesto Ramírez

A recurring dream of a large spherical boulder chasing me and my family,
like the boulder chasing Indiana Jones.

That scene haunted me as a kid.

And later haunted my dreams.

Our family of four running away from a boulder.

Ants to be crushed to oblivion

A boulder twenty times as large as us

We run for survival.

The migrant mind

Or the human mind?

I never know what happens if we stop, never dared to think what is next.

Memories monstrous.

This scene of cinema penetrates my consciousness unconsciously.

Maybe it's metaphorical.

Maybe we are running away from a war that never truly ended.

I am neither from here nor there.

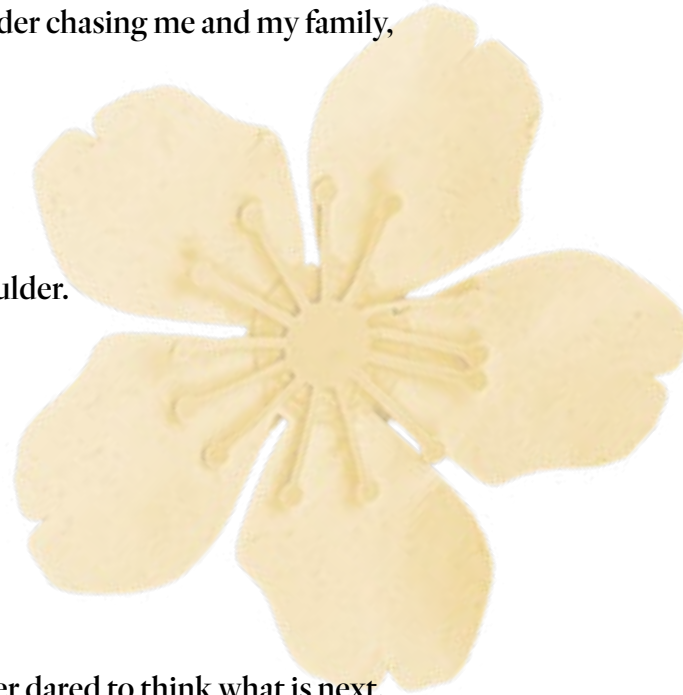
Herman@s lejanos never felt more real.

When the boulder of empire follows you...

We are the hamster in the hamster ball

When will we break loose?

Crack and break the boulder with the strength of a million migrants.



Los Eduardos

By Mauricio Ernesto Ramírez

There was Eduardo.

The boy who didn't speak English
but spoke with fists.

He socked me once.

Not because I was Salvadoran
and he was Mexican.

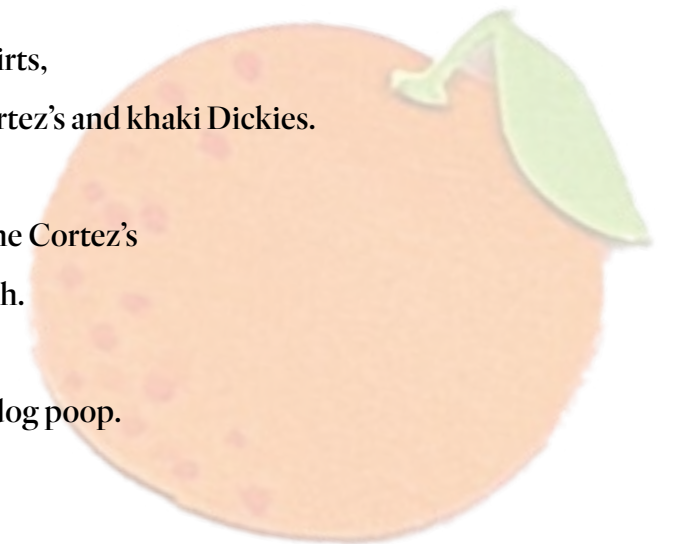
No, it was because he was an Eduardo.

"Nosotros los Eduardos somos fuertes,"
he said with pride,
he came from a long lineage of Eduardo's.
I wanted to be strong like that.

I wanted the slicked-back hair,
Top Dawg and Dawg Pound shirts,
laced with black-and-white Cortez's and khaki Dickies.

So, I asked mom to buy me some Cortez's
All white, with the black swoosh.
The first day I wore them,
I stepped in some light brown dog poop.

I took it as an omen.



The Toucan's Last Flight

By Mauricio Ernesto Ramírez
In memory of Sean Monterrosa

The toucan kneeled in twilight
wings half-raised
body caught between
a past still dreaming.

No song escaped him
that evening
because no one saw what was coming
from the sky.

A harpy eagle watched
through the glass eye of a machine
cold
and coiled.

No warning screech
just hot talons
grabbing the toucan's body
hot as bullets.

Three talons grasped the toucan,
but the hallux fatally wounded the toucan's head.

No threat in the feathers of a toucan.

What is a life worth
in a world where birds of color
are mistaken targets?
only silence nestled in the branches
where he might have sung.

The concrete jungle spoke
other toucans gathered at the edge of the cry
but the harpy eagle strikes,
still savage and unchallenged
rule the sky.

How long until toucans and eagles
fly in the same air
without blood in the feathers?



Asturias

Por Dolo Díaz

Asturias,
solo una palabra
sobre el valle verde.
Solo una palabra
entre roca negra
bajo la montaña.
Cantábrico amargo,
playa solitaria.
Solo una palabra.



La Noche

Por Dolo Díaz

Sus ojos y el azul del mar,
sus manos y el paso del tiempo,
su boca, el silencio.
El adiós de las olas que suben,
el adiós de las olas que bajan,
el adiós de la luna de hielo
que flota en el agua.
Él no las escucha.
La gran noche
que todo lo cubre,
esa noche que todo lo apaga,
se ha dormido con él en su barca.



Ocaso

Por Dolo Díaz

La lluvia de la tarde transparente.
El pálido verdor de la colina
se refleja en el aire, cristalina
gotea el agua de las hojas. Lenta
la tarde va cayendo. Una encina
tronchada en el camino, amarillenta
de ocasos, en su herido tronco alienta
la sombra leve de una golondrina.
El horizonte gris ya va dejando
olvidada su luz, el cielo viste
su claridad más oscura y más bella.
La ceniza del sol se va apagando,
parpadeante de frío, muda y triste,
nace y nace la primera estrella.



Regreso

Por Dolo Díaz

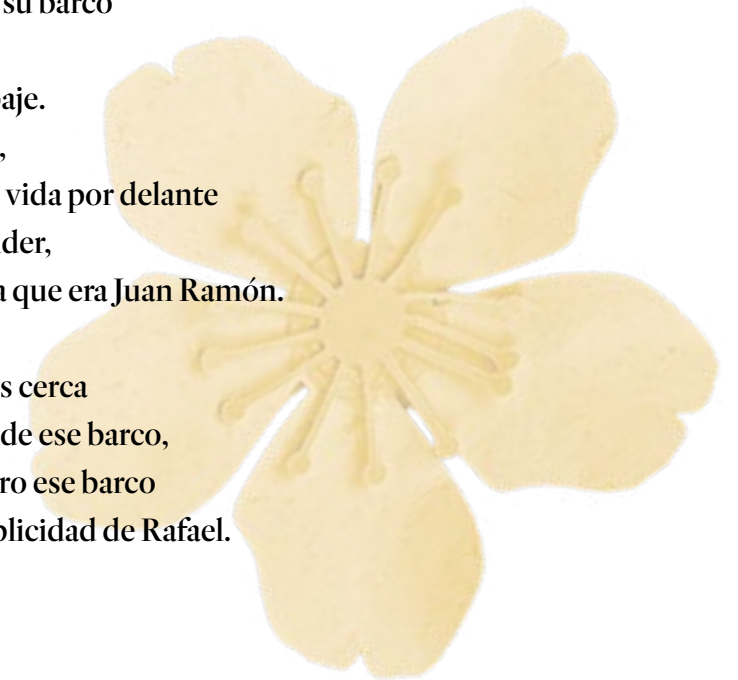
Es lo mismo, aunque crezca
y me madure el tiempo,
aunque viaje, aunque aprenda
en las escuelas del mundo
y me haga sabia y vieja...
Y aunque pasen los años,
cuando ya esté de vuelta
de la vida, y las cosas
me lo hayan dicho todo...
Contigo seré siempre la niña
ingenua y soñadora
que escuchaba en silencio
junto a la puerta entreabierta de tu alma.



Los poetas de mi juventud

Por Dolo Díaz

De joven
había Juan Ramón
y había Rafael,
y yo pensaba en la muerte
de su mano.
Juan Ramón
y su pozo blanco,
y su espíritu melancólico
en su pozo blanco
en la tarde caída
oyendo las campanas.
Rafael,
desafiante,
capitán de la mar,
esperando su barco
desnudo
y sin equipaje.
Y de joven,
mirando la vida por delante
y sin entender,
yo pensaba que era Juan Ramón.
Y ahora,
mucho más cerca
del pozo y de ese barco,
ahora espero ese barco
con la simplicidad de Rafael.



i'm just a kentucki girl

By Silvia McClamrock

i speak with loose vowels,
which is to say,
my spanish is shit.

yo hubiera podido
but it sounds podrido,
at least to me

i called the perro
un chucho,
even though it wasn't mine

but my neighbors are real nice
guatemaltecos and full of pride
that i never got to have

so please don't stare at me
in cuban because none of y'all
lived around here

lo que quiero
dejarte saber es hard won,
it's a hard one.

my genes don't match these hills,
but my heart does,
and i swear to god, cuba,

that is not a betrayal.
it's just that that I was raised here,
and what I saw everyday,

i fell in love with.
and i would do the same for you,
if I knew you.

but i don't.
i'm just a kentucki girl
and i'm not sure

if i love you,
or if i love you



If culture is magic, then assimilation is a dark art.

By Silvia McClamrock

You think that the outside forces do it to you, all the while you are doing it to yourself. I am the broken link in my family. It's funny when I speak, how American I sound. I called a pomo una botella de agua, took the bús, and missed the guagua. I try on a Cuban accent, but it makes people laugh. Strangers say, "I can't place your accent. Where are you from?" The answer is nowhere and everywhere. I speak refugee Spanish. American Spanish. I use words from every country because I pick them up as I go and I am scared shitless to talk Cuban because I can hear the laughter in my head and see the grief in my mother's eyes that I don't talk like her and never will. Better to speak English. Even now, when I speak it, I feel the shame that my American accent is sawing, severing any tie I had to Cuba, pings of broken threads ripping so loud in my ears, I want to scream. Studying it in school, it was a game of hiding my self hatred. And even though there were times I tried to hold my language and my culture in my arms, hug it, tight and close, I'm still the one who let it go. Because the stronger I grasped the more I lost my grip. I've been colonized; I've colonized myself. And there was no chance, really. Judas white skin, ubiquitous brown hair, I fit in without ever trying. I betrayed my language and my food the first chance I got. Elemen-

tary schoolers asking me, "Haha! Why do you call your dad 'puppy'?" Looking at my plate, they were right, beans do look like deer turds. But they didn't make me do it, they just laughed at something they didn't know. They were kids. They were questioning the unknown. I just wasn't strong enough to fight it. Why did everybody want to be American so bad? Why did talking about Cuba make Mami so sad? I had no idea what I was losing until it was already lost. And from this vantage point, I can finally see it. I remember the way things were, like a phantom limb that still hurts, even though it is long gone: the aunts, the uncles, the cousins, the parties, the food, the words, the music, the laughter. All gone now. That generation has been slowly dying off, taking the culture with them. And I'm the generation that lost it all and is now all too aware, seeing too clearly my part in its demise. Papa Dios, perdóname. Virgencita, por favor. I jumped in the melting pot and it dissolved me to nothing.

when I ask you your language

by Silvia McClamrock

when I ask you your language when I point to the
picture of a flag

I want you to know that I know that
these representations are imperfect

I know what it means to be
from there but not of there

I know how your mother tongue
can cradle you, comfort you,
give you life, how it can be
all you have

but I also know what it's like
to remember its history,
how the syllables become clots in your throat
and somewhere one of your ancestors
is wondering how you don't choke
on her spilled blood

and the flag
I know how it can haunt you
broken promises rippling in the wind
the flapping of empty words
that you thought
were supposed to mean something
I know how some tears
are shaped like stars

but what I really want to know
and don't know how to ask is

what is your bread?
how many words
do you have for mother?
which songs are portals?
were your city streets doused
in sunset? did the crickets
chirp hymns in the hills?

more than borders, more than laws
for years on years on years
we are the citizens of our stories,
of our bread, and of our song

when I ask you your language
this is what I'm asking



Cuando se colapsa una estrella

Por Patricia González-Salinas

Tú me enseñaste,
Cómo soñar,
Y por mis sueños luchar.
Y porque te amaba,
Me esforcé, y logré brillar,
Y alcanzar las alturas del cielo.
Pero hace frío para el sol,
Cuando la fama y el dinero,
No otorgan calidez.
Y mucho me costó,
Un premio tan solitario,
Mi mente de preguntas y presión se llenó, al tomar
el inventario.
¿Cómo es posible que esto sea lo que se siente
ganar?
Quizás hubiera sido más feliz jugando mi vida al
azar.
Es cuando me di por vencida,
Y a mi existencia decidí explotar.
No llores por mí,
Ni lamentes mi pérdida.
No me busques,
Para darme una despedida.
Recuerda que fui yo quien decidió,
En búsqueda de descanso y paz.
Pero si soy la causa,
Quiero ser el único efecto.
Si necesitas, guárdame en tus memorias.
Pues, es la única manera segura de volver a estar

Donde yo estoy...donde tú estás.
Recuerda que...
Cuando se colapsa una estrella
No te acerques a ella,
Guarda la distancia,
Por la gravedad...
Cuando se colapsa una estrella,
No te acerques a ella,
Resiste la curiosidad,
No busques el manantial del fuego,
Porque lo que brilla,
Es solo un recuerdo.
Y lo único que queda,
Es una muerte viva,
Y una oscuridad,
Que se alimenta de la luz.

Fénix

Por Patricia González-Salinas

Luché contra la muerte,
Y yo gané.
Todas mis fuerzas,
Reforcé.
Toqué fondo,
Pero me levanté.
Salí del fuego,
Pero no me quemé.
No soy Jesús,
Pero resucité.
Me sacudí las cenizas,
Y volé y volé.
Por el cielo
Me paseé.
Maravillosas vistas,
Yo miré.
A las alturas,
Me lancé.
Y de la venganza,
Me olvidé.
No soy Jesús,
Pero resucité.
Me sacudí las cenizas,
Y volé y volé.



Mis lentes oscuros

Por Patricia González-Salinas

Lentes oscuros,
Ayúdenme a ocultar,
La condición,
De mi alma funesta.
Lentes oscuros,
No dejen que el pozo negro en mi pecho,
Tinte con rayos amarillos,
La luz del día.
Lentes oscuros,
Cubre el vitral de mi alma rota,
Pues ningún ser viviente debe presenciar,
Rosas negras brotando del suelo estéril.



A poem with no title, in which language has failed me again

By Natalee Borum

You say maybe it's a premonition and I chuckle / Because that's what you did after you said it / Because I am too embarrassed to tell you I do not know what that word means / I tell my sister the next morning / She knows, she always does / She asks did you feel like you were 'the dumb brown girl'? / Mom did not let us learn Spanish in primary school / She was afraid / Believed English is better for your future / Dad tells his coworkers I am in grad school / He believes I am becoming something / Mid-conversation, I pretend to text on my phone / "premonition definition" / I type / "aboutness definition" / I search / The tacquero told me I had a good accent when I ordered dos de carne asada y uno de pollo por favor / I do not believe him / I say CeraVe like será-veh / I read Spanish aloud and pretend I am Mexican / I am Mexican / Say it con ganas / Fuerza / My mom taught me to stand up for myself / Look, Natalee, yours is the only one without a Latino last name / "Borum last name origin" / I consider adding my middle name for cultural credibility / Or is it confidence / Something like validation / Dad asks me to translate when my tías talk chisme in the kitchen / After what I can parse out, I tell him a watered-down account / 20-something years of marriage and he hasn't learned a lick of Spanish / I shiver / I save the juicy parts for myself / But I am missing half the characters in this story / I write captions over heads in Spanish and English / It seems I cannot keep up either way / Pinche cabrón / No, I cannot translate that for you / "Spanish to English" / "better ways to say" / "synonym for" / "what is the word for when" / Maybe it's a premonition / Did you feel like you were 'the dumb brown girl'? / Do you feel like you're the dumb brown girl? / Do you feel dumb, brown girl?

Borderland

By Natalee Borum

You're interested in the border, aren't you?

The white walls seemed smaller as the sun set
through the window, dimming the light
of the grim, rectangular room we sat in.

Our circle of bodies surrounded the question,
pausing, holding the same silent breath.

If I was a good person I would give my professor,
this woman I hardly know, the benefit of the doubt.

I would blame her age or her white complexion
for blinding her of the weight of what she said.

I would say it's alright that she doesn't understand,
doesn't think about the past and the present as one.

I would forgive her for the way she reached
deep into my spine and struck a nerve.

For the way she shamelessly called to the surface
the very fear that plagues my mind, the tension
that drives every single word I speak, and the dread
that consumes every single doubt that I carry.

I would like to tell her it's not a simple yes or no.

I was born with an inheritance of brown skin,

double L's and tildes over ñ's (eh-nyeh).

With a tongue that can handle the sinus-clearing,
back-of-the-throat burning spice of chili peppers,
peppercorn, achiote, and cayenne pepper.

With an ear tuned for the intonation of Spanish
and Spanglish, an ear that knows gritos of laughter
are different from those of love and correction.

Of an accent that drags the vowels of your name
the same way your mother drags you by the ear.

And I inherited a history molded by fear.

My Nana tells me of her escape from smacks
across the face and burns from clothing irons.

She holds back tears as she describes the river
she crossed, the river she could not swim in,

the river she was mercifully pulled out of.

She wipes tears from her eyes, remembering
how she passed my mother to a coyote, a stranger
that would meet her on the other side of the river
and hand back her baby in one piece.

But within my inheritance is the motivation to move

forward. Forward from the dirt road with metal posts
and invisible walls separating me from my history.

In seconds the sun has set, and the classroom was lit
with only the fluorescent lights above, spotlighting
the tops of our heads and humming over silence.

I let out a breath in the form of a small laugh.

Heat rushed up the sides of my neck, something like
anger or sadness and a little bit of shame.

And I said Yes, I am interested in the border,
to this white woman I hardly know.



Why Does Tía Luna Always Cry When We Make Tamales?

By Lael Flores

The kitchen is hot, as though the Arizona summer has been crammed inside its four walls. As the terracotta ground sizzles outside the window, pink pork flesh crackles in a pan on the stovetop. Little Nina's eyes are fastened on it, and she licks her childish lips. She is too busy breathing in the meat's sweet scent, which carries the faintest undertone of barn animals and manure, to prepare herself for the viper-like strike from Abuela's hand.

"Dámela, Nina," snaps Abuela.

Nina starts. When she gazes up at her grandmother, all she sees is the silhouette of a dandelion clock against the bright blue window. She suddenly remembers that she is holding the lard and gives it to Abuela, who empties it into a large bowl. As the beaters transform the lard into a cloud-like fluff resembling Abuela's hair, Nina traipses over to see what Tía Luna is doing.

In her corner, Tía Luna is oddly silent. She pokes at the corn husks, watching with tired eyes as they bob up and down in the hot water. Nina asks if she can poke them too, but Tía Luna doesn't seem to hear her or even realize she is there. Her thin brown face grows intent; her brows begin to pucker, and moisture glimmers in her eyes.

"Tía Luna?" says Nina, but Tía Luna does not answer. Her cheeks resemble the San Pedro Valley, tears winding down like the river through the Paleozoic rocks. Nina's first instinct is to comfort. She extends a small brown paw and touches Tía Luna's arm. Tía Luna returns from wherever she had disappeared to. She dashes the tears from her eyes and excuses herself from the kitchen in a choked voice. Abuela is too busy making the Masa dough to notice, but Nina gazes after her, wistful and moved.

Leaping down from the counter, Nina scurries like a beetle to the stove, where her mother stands, spatula in hand. From her elegant heights, Mama gazes down at Nina with a smile like pan dulce and pats her head. She continues to rake the pork meat back and forth in the pan with her spatula, stroking Nina's hair with her free hand. Like a friendly chucho, Nina nestles into the embrace, rubs her cheek against Mama's floral skirt. Then, slowly, wonderingly, she looks up at Mama with doe-wide eyes and says,

"Why does Tía Luna always cry when we make tamales?"

Mama's sweet smile falters, her face becoming a forecast of afternoon showers. Hesitantly, she parts her lips; but before she can utter a sound, Abuela's voice rings out above all the crackling and the sizzling.

"Because her name means moon in Spanish," she says wisely.

Mama seems to understand. She nods, her brown eyes tinged with blue.

"Tía Luna cries because of her voice," she explains to her daughter. "She used to sing like a Pyrrhuloxia—songs in Spanish. Her voice used to break hearts."

"She used to sing 'La Chona' for the radio," Abuela chimes in. "She used to sing 'La Chona' and dance."

Abuela and Mama have stopped their stirring, grinding, and whisking. They gaze at each other, their dark eyes beginning to flood.

"She cries because of Señor Moreno," says Mama. "They used to dance to the mariachi together on Sunday nights."

"She cries because of the casita," says Abuela, "and the tin roof's music on a rainy morning."

"She cries because of the roosters and the dogs," says Mama, "and the mercados filled with chiles and love."

"Because of the greetings of friends on the village streets," says Abuela, "and the festivals and songs to celebrate the dead."

"Because of the tears you can't shed over the pozole," adds Mama, smiling a little, "and how we used to turn San Antonio upside down to pray."

"She cries because of Anna," says Abuela boldly. She pushes away the Masa before her tears can slip down into it—an old instinct.

Mama nods. Again, she understands. Stooping down to kiss little Nina on the nose, she whispers softly, tenderly,

"She cries because of our sister, the one we left behind."



Questions that keep me up at night

By Deyanira Vielma

How do you keep a heart from breaking?

It is suffused with tender affection –

like the air, warm and thick with vainilla and canela, a hot cup of mami's atole waiting to be sipped, only to settle (just right) in the stomach, because it's her inherent need to nurture, to nourish.

like the knowledge that papi will cry, hands already equipped with tissues, because how could he not express his love (when he gives it so freely?)

How do you salvage the spirit from splintering?

It is strengthened by wisdom –

from the tongues and tales of those indigenous to the land that uplift the soul and carry the weight of la raza's thunderous cries of fury about long days and longer nights, about split fingers and split lips and split families; about a land too rich with people too brown and too poor.

from the corridos that recount the courage of the brave, and downtrodden, and the orgullo that fuels the fight.

from the past that dictates history repeats itself again, and again, and again.

How do you keep the voice from wavering?

You don't –

let the tenderness envelop you;

let the wisdom guide you;

let the hope embolden you –

to act,

to speak,

to help,

to learn,

to empathize,

to understand,

to love.



The Most Beautiful Woman in the World is Mexican

By Robert G. Retana

“Solitude is the most profound fact of the human condition.” – Octavio Paz

There is a treacherous line between being a young girl and a woman—that moment when a girl looks older than her age, when she is made up, even if her thoughts and emotions are those of an adolescent. This is the point at which Pilar Mejia finds herself, and the transition to becoming a woman has placed her in the position of making a cruel choice. Pilar is alone in her room in her father’s house, a small, somewhat dilapidated Craftsman bungalow in East Los Angeles. Her arched eyebrows, filled in with a pencil, and expertly applied false eyelashes, give her a more mature appearance, even though she is still a teenager.

She is watching “Doña Barbara,” starring legendary Mexican actress Maria Felix on a small black and white RCA television. Pilar has seen the film a few times before and always watches it when it is aired on television. In the movie, released in 1943, Maria Felix stars in the title role. Set in 19th-century Venezuela, Doña Bárbara is powerful, seductive, and mysterious. The experience of being gang raped in her youth by men who also shot her first love, Asdrubal, marks her forever. Doña Bárbara then becomes la devoradora de hombres—the devourer of men. After taking advantage of her husband, Lorenzo Barquero, who owns a cattle ranch, Doña Barba-

ra steals Lorenzo’s property and fortune. She kicks him and their daughter Marisela out, leaving them penniless. Doña Barbara’s only interest is to amass more wealth and power. Everything changes when she meets Santos, the handsome son of the Luzardo family. Educated in the city, he returns to take control of his family’s rural estate. Doña Barbara is immediately attracted to Santos, who reminds her of Asdrubal. She uses black magic to make Santos fall in love with her and gain access to his estate. Doña Barbara later realizes he loves her estranged daughter, Marisela. She then looks for ways to ruin Santos.

The movie’s impact has additional significance to Pilar as she looks down at her growing stomach, now starting to push against her embroidered white blouse, and wonders how much longer she can avoid telling her father she is pregnant. Doña Barbara, Pilar knows, would never find herself in a situation like this. Her tiny room is lit with candles, and the furniture is a collection of objects others left on the street. She happily brought them home and did her best to clean and repair them. Posters of Mexican singers, Javier Solis and Lola Beltran, are on her wall, with images of a new British band called the Beatles. A red sarape blanket is on her bed. At seventeen, she cannot support herself, and soon, her belly will betray her when she looks for work. The baby’s father is nowhere to be found. Ramon Valenzuela, a sophisti-

cated womanizer, fooled her into thinking he loved her. He said he loved her because she was beautiful, but Pilar now realizes it might have been better to be less attractive and more intelligent.

Sitting in her room contemplating her situation, she thinks about her father, Jorge, also a womanizer, who spent plenty of time and money at the local bars. At least her father worked and kept a roof over her head, if nothing else. She often had to go to the neighbor’s house to eat, as the refrigerator at home was usually empty, given that her father spent more time at the bars than at the supermarket. She never expected him to come home on paydays because he would cash his check and drink until the bars closed. A former boxer with greying hair, skin the color of sandpaper, and a muscular build, he was famous in the neighborhood. Despite his age, he often got into brawls, given his quick temper. Men feared him, and women desired him, thinking he was the strong, silent type, like John Wayne if he had been Native American. A Yaqui Indian, he often told Pilar about his ancestors who fled the genocides and wars in Mexico from 1850 to 1930 and came to the United States to hide from persecution. “Your very existence is a miracle because of what your ancestors did to survive,” he would tell Pilar. Like most teenagers, this was the last thing she cared about. She never paid attention to his tales, though she would always remember his stories about his family in Arizona and Texas, who were there before that land was taken and became part of the United States, and how, when he

was young, he played football for an Indian league.

Pilar’s mother died when she was a little girl, making Jorge a widower who had to raise a young daughter all alone. This is why Jorge always had an aura of loneliness, even when surrounded by women and drinking buddies at the beer joints. He filled a room with his physical presence, but his ability to connect with others on an emotional level always came up short. Pilar forgave him because she knew he was in pain, even though he could not express it. She diligently washed and ironed his clothes and cooked for him when he brought food home.

As she turned the television off when the movie ended, she realized that she had been looking for a way out of her situation. She felt like a maid in her father’s house and dreamed of romance. Unfortunately, she only made things worse by projecting all her hopes onto the wrong man, or any man for that matter.

The next day, she visited her next-door neighbor, Matilda, who knew that Pilar often went without eating; so, she would feed her, even if it was only beans and tortillas. “Ay mija,” she would say, “your father never recovered from your mother’s death. He took up the bottle and never put it down.” Matilda was a stout woman with long black hair worn in a single braid that ran down her back. She was an expert cook who could make delicious meals out of the simplest ingredients. Her seven children were all pleasingly plump, given that there was always something tempting on the stove. Matilda believed ev-

ery ailment could be cured with food and the herbs she kept in her kitchen cabinet. She learned to cook from her mother growing up in Oaxaca, and Matilda taught her kids those traditions after she brought them to the United States. As a result, Matilda's kids were always healthy despite their weight and never missed a day of school. "The only thing I can't cure is stupidity," Matilda told Pilar. "If you don't have common sense, only God can help you, and even he gets tired of people who don't listen to good advice."

Matilda had said this before, but Pilar never thought Matilda was talking about her until she fell for Ramon's promises and became pregnant. Like her father, Ramon was well-known in the neighborhood. He liked to show off at bars and pick up the tab for rounds of drinks for his friends. He wore expensive, tailored suits, usually with a bright red tie, shoes with a mirror shine, and a gold ring with a large diamond that he always managed to show off in the way he used his hands. He drank because, simply, he liked to drink. But he also drank to smooth out his words. The liquor made him charming and outgoing, but when he drank, he would flirt with other women and not show up for Pilar as promised. A few times, he became violent towards her when she argued with him about his behavior. He later apologized and said it would not happen again, but it always did. Ramon was the father of several children with many different women. "He never supported any of those kids—and those are just the ones he knows about," Pilar told Matilda. "Why did I think he would change for me and my baby?" With no mother to guide her and

a father who is seldom at home, Pilar was the perfect target for a charmer with bad intentions.

People said Ramon belonged to the Mexican Mafia and was a drug dealer. Whatever the truth was, he never went without a pretty woman on his arm. Despite all of this, Pilar went with what felt familiar. It seemed to her that drinking and womanizing were what men do. Pilar finally realized she was just one more conquest for him, and he was on to the next. No wonder when he took her to the local bar, people there looked at her as you would look at a turkey before Thanksgiving. "You are so young," a woman told her in the restroom as she touched up her makeup. "Go home before it is too late." Of course, Pilar did not listen and wondered what the woman was talking about. She finally knew as she lay in bed alone, trying to fall asleep.

Maria Felix was one of the most beautiful and successful actresses from the Golden Age of Mexican cinema, reaching such fame that she became known simply as "La Doña." Maria Felix never went to Hollywood. She received offers, but, as a Mexican actress, those offers were for roles as a maid or other trivial bit parts. She refused the offers and instead starred in several successful movies in Europe, including *Mare Nostrum* (1948), *Una Mujer Cualquiera* (1950), and *Messalina* (1951). She knew her worth. She was married four times and married well. The song "Maria Bonita" was composed for her as a wedding gift from her second husband, singer

and composer Augustin Lara. Her third husband, Jorge Negrete, the famous Mexican actor, married her in 1952. All of Mexico celebrated the marriage of two Cine Dorado de Mexico icons. Their wedding was broadcast on television and was one of the most anticipated and viewed events of that time. It was described as the wedding of the century. With her beauty and confidence, the actress completely inhabited the identity of a devourer of men. She used men to her advantage. The actress is quoted as saying that she is the one who chooses her men, not the other way around, which is why she has always been happy in relationships. She does not worry about any one man when there are so many men in the world. A woman with the heart of a man has superseded the image of the submissive Mexican woman. She was the most beautiful woman in the world and knew it.

As much as she admired her, Pilar was nowhere close to being like Maria Felix. She could barely feed herself, much less a baby. "Los niños comen todos los dias," Matilda told her when she learned about the pregnancy. "I can't be responsible for feeding you and a baby." Pilar knew Matilda was right and did not blame her for stating the obvious. "This poor baby will start out with no father, and a mother who can't afford to feed her," Pilar told Matilda. "I can't let this baby go hungry like I always do." She was not a devourer of men, but her time to be strong was now. "I realize that I always let things happen to me," Pilar told Matilda. "I need to learn to make things happen.

If I depend on others to do what's right, I will always be disappointed." Matilda's heart broke as she heard Pilar's words. This girl with no mother had learned a lesson the hard way with no one to break her fall.

Six months later, Pilar gave birth to a healthy baby girl. Matilda said the baby looked like her, especially around the eyes. Pilar's father never came to see the baby, warning her not to bring another mouth to feed into his house. "If you are woman enough to lay down with a man, you are woman enough to figure out how to take care of your baby," he told her. She stayed in the hospital for two days where she could hold and feed the baby. Her heart was broken, yet she knew that her heart was what got her into this situation. Her brain would need to take over from now on, or the story would repeat itself the next time a man started to make promises he couldn't keep.

When she left the hospital with the baby, named Alejandra, she went to the home of Mrs. Lopez, who had agreed to adopt the baby. Mrs. Lopez had two boys but wanted a girl. She lived in a lovely, tidy house where she was clearly in charge. Her husband stayed in the background while she did all the talking. "You are doing the right thing by this baby," she said. "No le va a faltar nada," she said as she took the baby from Pilar's arms. In that moment, she felt like her father, with no words to describe her feelings. Pilar wanted to change her mind, and for a second, she almost did, but she had nowhere to take the baby.

As she was about to leave, Mrs. Lopez told Pilar to hold the baby for a picture so Mrs. Lopez could give it to Alejandra when she was grown. "She will

want to know who her biological mother is one day, and I'll give her this picture when the time is right." Pilar took the baby back. Alejandra held onto her, already knowing that Pilar was her mother. Alejandra clung to her as if she knew this was the end and pulled on Pilar's hair with her tiny hands. "Don't let me go," Alejandra seemed to be saying with her movements. Pilar thought that she might go crazy if this went on much longer. She wanted to run away and make a new life with her daughter, but she knew she would not get far with the few dollars in her pocket. She posed for the picture without being able to force a smile. Her green eyes, she knew, would not be evident in the black and white photo, but the sadness in her eyes would show up. She was beautiful, with long, dark hair pulled back. Pilar was a tomboy who grew up with no siblings and had to defend herself from the kids in the neighborhood. To everyone's surprise, she grew into a beauty. Men turned their heads whenever she passed. But, at this moment, she felt like a failure. She wondered how she would face her friends and family when she went home without her baby. As soon as Mrs. Lopez took the picture, Pilar gave Alejandra to her and left without looking back.

the photo. Pilar, who took great pride in her Mexican heritage, would often say to herself, "My mother is the most beautiful woman, and she is Mexican!" When she said this, she also hoped that she resembled her mother. Alejandra would not focus on her father; she did not know who he was or what he looked like. Instead, she would sometimes look at the photograph and wonder why her mother did not keep her. She would think that her birth mother couldn't be bothered taking care of her. She probably wanted to have fun instead. If her mother could see how well she turned out, would she be sorry she gave her away? Did she ever think about her or try to look for her? Alejandra would not understand how strong one must be when there is no choice but to walk away.



Fiesta de Reyes

By Natalee Borum

Stomping on cobblestones
was the sound my Nana taught me
to remember the spirits of our ancestors.

Feel their joy through our feet
and hear the resonance of a strum
the fullness of a

boom

boom

crack

of a drum, or the

riiiiiiiing

bright rattling of a tambourine

as music jolts from the soles of our feet

and pumps ancient blood through our veins.

Greeted with a grito,
lost abuelas, abuelos, tías y tíos,
fill the spaces between our bodies
and we dance with generations.

Spilt margaritas, empty bottles of cervezas,
slices of limón, and salt on the tip of my tongue
stand in as offerings on this ofrenda
of gravel and dirt.

Let our laughs be cempasúchiles, soft petals
scattered across the cobblestone ground
and our eyes las velas lighting the holy ground
inviting you closer

to baila baila baila
como si es vida o muerte.

See these stomps,
these smiles,
as signs of you living on
as we hear your voice in the hum of the night
and hold close a whisper of your name, our heritage,
en el lenguaje con que cantaste.

Years later, Alejandra would often look at the picture of the mother she had never met. The photo was of the most beautiful woman she had ever seen. She studied the photo and wondered whether her mother had light eyes based on how they looked in

Reggaeton in South Carolina

By Lázaro Gutiérrez

Amidst the confederate flags, I am disturbing the peace. *El Abayarde*, destroying the speakers of my car, full blast, loud and clear between the trailer parks of the Deep South, rusted over with the worship of fascists, taken over by dozens of churches and pastors preaching hate, and false promises drank like kool-aid. Me, Cuban-born, latino from the very core, bloodlike lava, forged by the hammer of poverty—minority—as they call me. Yet—I live in God’s frequency—at war with the stereotypes. I break generational curses daily—I glide through the curves of broken, worn-out roads, and I am smooth like a reggaeton beat, and hard-hitting, like the streets that raised me. Bursting tempo, *bandoleros* through the bluetooth. At seven, I ran in my underwear through the streets of Esmeralda, Camagüey, thin, like a *saco de huesos*, a child with nothing. At thirty, I drive a luxury SUV to a white picket fence, I have a landscaper and a tunnel vision to the promised success of the land I now inhabit and call home. I don’t know my neighbors, but I am thriving where I’m not welcome—this is home to me as it is to the natural born. I do it equally with my

tumbao and my master’s degree, the labor of my father’s back, the sweat upon his brow, the fulfillment of my ancestors’ dreams. These clean, soft hands carry the scars of my ancestors when I type, they mold their wishes into reality when I lead a meeting, they dry their tears when I am rewarded.

I plant myself in the soil, unfit for my Caribbean roots, and I grow; I water myself—

I am—a professional hustler in a land where I am not wanted—

y como dijo Tego, “*estoy aquí tirando pa’ lante.*”





Mariquita
Por Fabián González González
Fotografía digital

The Stories We Tell

By Lucia Quiros

I was taught the art of storytelling through scorpions—specifically my father’s. And no, the scorpion is not a metaphor—I’m talking real, venomous scorpions. A pet my father played with as a child growing up in Costa Rica. The stories he told me taught me that even danger, when told with the right words, can sound like pure and utter magic.

I remember the nights spent sitting on my bed, with the princess bed sheets and cool air blasting through the AC. The lights off and a crack of light shining through the gap at the bottom of my door. He told me stories of the things he did when he was younger, where he grew up in the countryside of Costa Rica. A pet scorpion! He caught it, and kept it in his house, a danger hidden in plain sight. He held the scorpion with care, like the pet he claimed it was. We’d make up stories—fairytales if you will, with nonexistent kingdoms where unicorns roamed, and glitter adorned the castle; everything was perfect. Now, my dad is the head chef at a successful restaurant, still telling me stories of his past. The only difference is, I don’t have princess bed sheets anymore. I don’t clutch stuffed animals at night or hide from the dark. Now, stories aren’t just night tales meant to put me to sleep. Stories are how I find myself, and how I get to know the ins and outs of my person—the person that dwells inside, always changing and evolving.

I listen into another story—this one unwritten. A woman whom I’ve come to know as a regular begins speaking about a dog. Pulling her glasses off of her head, leaning closer to her phone, she brings up a picture to show me the dog. I nod along, a smile carving onto my face. I tell her how cute the little dog is, and she continues telling me the story. She’s always nursing a drink with a can-do attitude, and her lips pulling upward. There are regulars here at the restaurant, but she is my favorite. Always a new story to share, the words forming on her lips. Always something new glinting in her eyes, a prospect I’m eager to listen to. Stories about the adventures she’s embarked on—maybe whispering promises of my own adventures yet to come.

Maybe that’s when the storytelling began. Late nights that were spent making up princes, dragons, and creatures that didn’t exist. And now, I tell stories for a different purpose. I write for others. In hopes of crafting comfort for others in the way other authors have comforted me. I still write to create something magnificent, and embellishing—but not for the magic or sparkles. Maybe I write because of my dad, scorpions, and trees. Regulars with iced drinks, and dreams. Write the whole truth—quiet moments, the action-packed ones and everything in between. I want to keep collecting stories, like memories in a jar. I want to collect the ones told by natural story-

The Time I Dropped the Tortillas

By D.G. Rosales

tellers, and the ones coming from people that don't even know they're telling them. Hearing all of these stories shaped me into the writer that I am today.

I used to cling to my beloved stuffed animals, and dream of kingdoms in which I wielded swords of titanium. However, now I wield not a sword but a pen, and I've built a kingdom just of storytellers. I founded a literary magazine for teens, creating a space where writers just like me can share their truths—which reached teen writers from multiple states in the first week and six countries within the first month. I've read every single submission with the same reverence I once reserved for the stories that my father told me.

Scorpions taught me not only how to write—but how to listen through the noise. And that is exactly the kind of storyteller I aspire to be.

I also learned that music tells stories. Somewhere in between the bars of Randall Standridge, quarter and sixteenth notes painted landscapes, feelings, whole worlds. And, as my hands danced over the keys of my bassoon (and my volume drowned out the flute in front of me), I realized that sometimes rhythms can speak. They seem to jump off the page at times, looking at me. I saw their tone, heard their shape. When things are so abstract, yet so certain like music is, you begin ap-

preciating mistakes. Every time my tongue slipped on a staccato, and made it legato, I made a mental note and then took out my pencil—marked in all uppercase, 'STACCATO'—the uppercase was the most important part. But sometimes I apologized to the paper for yelling at it.

When you think about it, music, writing, speech—they are all the same. They are all scorpions in a way.



Above Abuelita Linda's front door, Psalm 91 looked down at us from a tattered hotel Bible, the kind meant to be stolen. She didn't know how to display it properly, but she insisted it go up there.

"For protection," she said.

But how much protection could it really offer if you had to take a hammer to it? Driving a nail straight through the word of God had to be blasphemy, or at the very least, it probably canceled out the blessing.

The funny thing is, she wasn't even religious. Doña Herlinda Rodríguez didn't have a traditional bone in her body. She was far more likely to warn you about brujería than to pray for you.

Abuelita —never just abuela— sat on the same faded pink couch I'd known all my life. I was eleven, and that couch had been there longer than I had. A fixture of the house as much as its foundation.

"Mija, mirá, hay que cubrirle bien la carita al bebé cuando salgas. Uno nunca sabe quién le quiere hacer el ojo," she cautioned, crossing herself to drive the point home.

"Ay, mamá. No empiece," said Mom, rocking baby Ángel. The crying that had prompted the comment was gone, soothed away by mom magic.

A lullaby and a mother's embrace, it seemed, worked just as well as a limpia. Didn't even need to waste an egg.

"Dinner is almost ready," Doña Linda said to no one in particular, already standing to make her great escape — the way she always did when a conversation got too real. Practiced misdirection. A magician palming a card.

"¿Vamos, mijito?" She asked, already turning toward the door. It was phrased like a question, but she wasn't waiting for an answer. "I still need tortillas."

I hadn't looked up from my Game Boy all this time. The yellow brick with its tiny black and white screen had absorbed my whole world until then. But only a fool would turn down an adventure with Abuelita Linda.

She could turn a grocery list into a fetch quest. A walk down the block became a tienda-hopping treasure hunt, and I, her Sancho Panza, would follow her into battle, whether windmills or comales.

"Have I told you about the time I dropped the tortillas?" She started, and just like that, the world inside gave way to her tale. The "Finish Him..." coming out of the tiny Nintendo speaker already forgotten.

Her stories always carried the air of a campfire ghost tale—dramatic, winding, lit by a bright grin and a kind of levity that didn't quite fit. They weren't her life anymore. They'd become myths. Like that little free Bible above her door: a shield. Only this one was meant to protect her from herself.

Herlinda was not yet a Doña, let alone an abuela. She was just a thirteen-year-old kid in rural El Salvador, barely older than me. But the weight she carried feels heavier the older I get.

She'd been sent to sell a bundle of fresh tortillas on the street. Shouting out to passersby. Holding a stack of warmth wrapped in cloth.

"I wasn't allowed home, y'know, not until I sold every single tortilla," she continued. "But before my first sale, I tripped. All the tortillas fell in the mud, and I ruined one of the few shirts I owned."

The story beat, so familiar I could almost anticipate the exact moment she'd shrug and say: "So I ran away instead." Like that was where the story ended. Roll telenovela credits. Cue Vicente Fernández.

I'd heard this one enough times to remember an earlier, less polished draft. Mom knew the original.

My mom has always been honest to a fault. We learned some truths far too young. But I ap-

preciated how she never talked down to us kids. If she didn't know something, we'd type the topic into Encyclopedia Encarta and learn together. She didn't lie, and she didn't soften the edges.

She'd been hit. A lot.

Sometimes for reasons she could remember, like breaking a plate or staying out too long. Other times, Doña Linda was already angry, and my mom was too small to fight back.

Still, she never begrudged her for it. They loved each other. Fiercely. And in the end, my mom was there, offering comfort and love in those final hours. But love doesn't fix everything. It just makes the truth harder to say out loud.

So that's how I knew the part that came next: after dropping the tortillas, she lived on the street for two weeks. Because maybe, just maybe, if she told it differently, she hadn't given up and gone back.

But there's no shame in survival. She had no education, no money, no food. No hope otherwise.

She once told me she only came back when the hunger finally outweighed the fear. "I thought maybe," she said, "the beating would be less painful than starving."

I guess it was.

She was beaten within an inch of her life, bedridden for days before she could be sent out to sell tortillas again. But she did. She walked the streets of El Mercado and earned that roof over her head.

We made it back to her house, and I never noticed just how close to her chest she held the fresh tortillas. So hot they surely burned.

I still remember the smell of that place: a strange, comforting mix of mildew, rosewater perfume, and cooking spices. There was always a pot of frijoles simmering on the stove. It was a place where I felt loved and safe, even if, for my mom, it held far more complicated feelings. Still, she insisted we visit every month, so we could have a relationship with Abuelita Linda.

The meal was lovely, as they tended to be, but I'd be lying if I said I remembered the specifics. What I do remember is that the topic of our walk came up, and Doña Linda recounted the tortilla story yet again. Performed even more dramatically to match the size of her audience. This time, though, it ended differently.

She looked straight at Mom and said, "At least I never hit you, ¿verdad, mijita?" The words so nonchalantly thrown, indisputable truth to anyone watching.

Spoons stopped mid-air. A few mouths hung open.

"Lo que diga, mamita," replied Mom, not quite looking up. She hadn't been invited to the stage, but had to perform nonetheless. The show must go on.

My mom hit us sometimes.

Not like her mother did, and never out of cruelty. But it happened.

I don't blame her. There were warnings, and it was always understood. Those were the consequences of our actions. Every instance could be traced back to something we did, something we shouldn't have. The fear of raising thieves or liars often drowned out the voice in her head that said this wasn't the way.

She did the best she could with what she had. And what she had was trauma, thick as tar. A whole childhood packed in tight behind her ribs. But she never lied about it. Never rewrote it to sound prettier than it was.

That's something I hold close. Her life was truth. Not performance.

That night we said our goodbyes and hugged Abuelita Linda. She always wore that cholca smile—wide, a little crooked, missing teeth, but full of warmth. No matter how much darkness she carried, she let herself be a light.

Part of it could have been an act, a way to cope and make it through the day. But it was real to me.

Coplas por la muerte de su madre

Por Natalie Stocks

To eleven-year-old me, she wasn't a broken person. She was my partner in crime, a doting figure for my seven-year-old sister, her princesa, and a protector to baby Ángel.

But above all, she was still a mother. Someone who made mistakes but had done better than was done to her.

I watch my son sometimes and think: He'll never need to lie about the way he was raised. Not to himself.

Not to anyone.

From my mom, he'll know that my love was real. No part of it ever a performance.

From Doña Linda, he'll know that despite how bad things can get, we can smile through the pain and survive.

That's my story to rewrite, and my job to make sure none of it comes at the cost of fear.

I promise you, Abuelita, I'll continue what you started. I'll do better than my parents. And maybe, if I do this right, my son won't spend his life untying all the knots I left behind.

I will forever miss that dusty pink couch.

The Bible nailed to the wall.

The taste of your frijolitos.

The tales that changed with your mood.

But part of me knows—

I carry you with me.

Every time I put on a brave face.

Every time I tell a story.



La Discusión

La primera vez que leí “Coplas por la muerte de su padre” de Jorge Manrique, supe que quería escribir algo así para mi mamá. Perdí a mi madre cuando tenía 13 años, así que me resonó mucho el deseo de Manrique de honrar a su difunto padre. Mientras este poema sirve de inspiración y de modelo estructural para mi poema, los temas que expresa siguen más cerca del romanticismo de Rosalía de Castro y Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer. Al igual que el poema de Manrique, mi poema contempla la naturaleza de la muerte. Sin embargo, mientras “Coplas” expresa una perspectiva estoica y cristiana medieval sobre la muerte, mi poema, al igual que las obras de De Castro y Bécquer, aborda el tema desde una perspectiva profundamente personal que emite temas de anhelo, memoria, y duelo. Esto se logra utilizando imágenes naturales y científicas para transmitir la inevitabilidad de la pérdida.

Paralelismos estructurales con “Coplas por la muerte de su padre”

Una de las características más definitorias de “Coplas” es su meditación filosófica estructurada sobre la muerte. El poema está compuesto por cuarenta coplas. Cada copla se compone de cuatro tercetos que tienen dos versos de 8 sílabas y un

verso de 4 sílabas, creando la disposición de métricas: 8a-8b-4c-8a-8b-4c-8d-8e-4f-8d-8e-4f. Mi poema imita esta estructura, pero se moderniza con la omisión del esquema rítmico. Sin embargo, con esta estructura, Manrique desarrolla su argumento desde reflexiones generales sobre la mortalidad hasta un elogio específico para su padre (Dominguez 70). Mi poema refleja este enfoque estructurado, comenzando con una ley científica universal, la primera ley de la termodinámica, como fundamento para contemplar la muerte. Así como Manrique pasa de reflexionar sobre la impermanencia a aceptar la muerte de su padre, mi poema pasa de una premisa científica objetiva a una comprensión profundamente personal sobre la necesidad de la muerte.

Además de reflejar las “Coplas por la muerte de su padre” de Jorge Manrique a través de la estructura métrica, mi poema también es paralelo a su obra con un diálogo directo con la muerte. En Coplas, Manrique personifica la muerte como una presencia tranquila e inevitable, como un mensajero divino que conduce a su padre hacia el descanso eterno: “No se vos haga tan amarga / la batalla temerosa / que esperáis” (Manrique versos 373-375). Del mismo modo, mi poema tiene un diálogo con la muerte no como un final dramático sino como una transformación necesaria, un concepto introducido

científicamente a través de la Primera Ley de la Termodinámica. Esta ley, que establece que la energía no puede ser creada o destruida, se convierte en mi versión de la filosofía religiosa de Manrique, sugiriendo que la muerte no es aniquilación sino transferencia. Esto es particularmente evidente en la línea final del universo en su respuesta: “Ya / es tiempo de volver lo que / fue prestado.”

Temas románticos y la influencia de De Castro y Bécquer

Si bien mi poema se inspira en la estructura de Manrique, sus temas y emociones están más alineados con la poesía romántica, particularmente con las obras de De Castro y Bécquer. Sus poesía se caracterizan por la melancolía, la naturaleza como reflejo de las emociones humanas y la preocupación por la memoria y la pérdida, todas ellas centrales en mi poema. Como Edgar Allen Poe lo llamó, el romanticismo es el “intoxication of the heart” (Ivanovici 89).

De Castro, en “Las orillas del Sar,” utiliza frecuentemente la naturaleza para expresar estados emocionales profundos. Como señala Marta Beatriz Ferrari, su trabajo “consolida una línea poética meditativa, reflexiva que tiene su origen en el romanticismo” (Ferrari 59). Esta cualidad meditativa es fundamental para mi propia voz poética. En mi

poema, los movimientos inquietos del océano y su anhelo insatisfecho por la luna son similares al uso de De Castro de ríos, niebla y paisajes para reflejar el dolor existencial. Un buen ejemplo es una cita en su poema quito: “perdió su azul tu cielo, el campo su frescura, / el alba su candor” (de Castro versos 14-15). Estas imágenes sirven para crear un “tono intimista y filosófico” donde sus emociones se reflejan en la naturaleza (Ferrari 61).

Aún más, “Rima LIII” de Bécquer transmite la idea de que ciertas experiencias y conexiones son irremplazables por el uso de imágenes de golondrinas retornantes para simbolizar ciclos de amor y pérdida: “volverán las oscuras golondrinas / en tu balcón sus nidos a colgar... / pero aquéllas... ¡no volverán!” (Bécquer versos 1-8). Mi poema comparte esta preocupación temática al sugerir que, mientras la energía puede persistir, lo que se pierde - ya sea una persona o un momento en el tiempo - sigue siendo inalcanzable, como la luna al océano.

Además, mi poema tiene la fascinación romántica con el misterio de la muerte. A diferencia de Manrique, que presenta la muerte como un camino conocido hacia el descanso eterno, los poetas románticos a menudo la describen como un destino desconocido, envuelto en anhelo y dolor. Ferrari afirma que esto es el resultado de desear, “desde un presente de aflicción y de tinieblas, re-

cuperar la dicha pasada, la esperanza, la fe” (Ferrari 76). Es cierto que mis temas se alinean mucho más con esta afirmación.

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Coplas por la muerte de su madre

[I]

El océano anhela la
luna. Las olas retiran
de la costa
después de cada intento
fallido de alcanzarla.
Cada tirón
aumenta la distancia
entre mis pies y el polvo
que eras tú.

La arena se empapa
y luego se seca una
y otra vez.

[II]

La luz de los astros nada.
Es aquí donde reflexiono.

Reflexiono
sobre la primera ley, la de
Clausius y Thomson, la de
la termodinámica.

Va: “La energía no se puede
crear, tampoco se puede destruir.”

Compartimos.

El universo comparte con
gracia y aprovechamos
para vivir.

[III]

Sí, por eso tenemos que
morir. Alguien se debe
sacrificar.

Los brotes dicen gracias.

Tal vez yo debería sentir
consolado.

Pero, no. Mi ciencia se
pierde bajo todo el dolor.

Se ahoga.

Así que rezo a un dios, a
las fuerzas del universo.

No responde.

[IV]

Ahora todo lo que me
queda son preguntas. Llenan
mi cerebro

y gotean por mi garganta
e inundan mis pulmones.

Pruebo la sal.

¿Por qué? ¿Por qué tú, por qué yo?

Una ola se bloquea.

¿Por qué fuiste?

La ola se retira, el
agua traga, y se repite
el proceso.

[V]

La luz del día se esconde
bajo el horizonte. Yo
escondo lo

mismo. El cielo guarda sus
secretos, lo mismo que tú.

El cielo me

sonríe maravillosamente, lo
mismo que tú. Y el cielo
no existe, lo
mismo que tú. Ahora, los

fotones viajan ya por donde
sa no estás.

[VI]

Tu voz aún vibra en mi sangre.

Las memorias pican los
miles de cortes

en todo mi cuerpo mientras
me meto en el agua. Tu

voz brota de

mí. Esa voz, tan familiar,

que me despertó todos y
y cada una

de las mañanas, ahora

un eco, rebotando en
mi cerebro.

[VII]

Aún recuerdo tus manos. No
la idea, sino el peso
de tu piel.

Ese calor terrestre que tenía
el poder de calmar la fiebre.

Son fantasmas

que se enredan entre

mis dedos cuando tiemblo. No

es nostalgia,

es carne, es la luz de la

luna, eres tú.

[VIII]

Cuando cierro los ojos, a
veces confundo el tacto del
viento con tus

dedos. Es suave, llega sin
anunciarse.

Y aunque no deja marca,
el cuerpo la reconoce.

No estás tú,

pero el aire guarda tu
forma, y yo la respiro.

Te respiro.

[IX]

El océano anhela la
luna. Atrae a ella. A

veces la luna

está tan cerca que creo oír tu

susurro. Se cuele entre

las hojas como tú entre

mis sueños,

silenciosa. La llamo

por su fase, no por su nombre, y
eso basta.

Siempre está ahí, siempre
ha estado. Ahora está
cambiando.

[X]

Dicen que todo cambia.

La entropía nos arrastra
hacia el fin.

Lo que estaba ordenado
se disuelve en confusión
silenciosa.

Así que, es un hecho, todo
cambia. Tu energía está
en un otro

lugar ahora. Tal vez es
en las olas, tal vez es en
mis lágrimas.

[XI]

Saboreamos el más dulce
de los esplendores y luego
las olas los

lavan lejos. La sal del mar
me quema la boca mientras

miel aún gotea

de mi lengua. Así ahora
yo lleno este vacío que

me dejaste

una y otra vez, pero
es inútil. Hay un pinchazo
y soy débil.

[XII]

Todo lo que queda son las
preguntas. Curiosidad:

es lo que me

impulsa hacia adelante
y me arrastra hacia

abajo. Me

obliga preguntarte: Cuando
reflexionaste sobre tu vida,

¿eras feliz?

¿Dónde estás ahora? ¿Qué será de
una hija sin una mamá?

¿Qué será de mí?

[XIII]

Al final descubro que, sí,
la muerte es natural. Pero

entonces, ¿qué
es la vida? ¿Con qué quedan
los vivos? Cuando la pérdida
se repite, ¿nos
quedamos sufriendo? Cuando
la pérdida se repite, una
y otra vez,
¿qué me queda? La muerte no
es nada o es un lugar
que te tiene.

[XIV]

Todos caemos del cielo; es
del polvo de las estrellas
que formamos.
Se nos exige: existimos.
Entonces estamos aquí,
estamos de
repente vivos - un cerillo
enciende en la oscuridad
Tienes miedo.
Es natural tener miedo,
es instinto temer a la
oscuridad.

[XV]

Pero, con la suerte de tu
lado, eres recibido
con un cálido
abrazo por manos desgast-
adas por batallas tácitas.
Y con suerte, los
profundos ojos marrones te
miran y ven directamente

a tu alma.

Y mirarás hacia atrás al
humano que te acaba
de engendrar.

[XVI]

Entonces, tú aprendes.

Tú admiras y imitas.

Adornas tus
ojos con el delineador
de ojos de ella. Todos
de sus algos

favoritos - tú observas.

Y luego, se convierten en

tuyos. En ti,

hay pedacitos de ella
permanentemente tejidos.

Están allí.

[XVII]

El verde era tu color
favorito. El verde es mi
favorito.

El verde es nuestro. Un tulipán
era tu flor favorita.

De todas las
flores, también es mía. La flor,
la tulipán,
es nuestro. Estos son partes
de ti aferrados a mí
eternamente.

[XVIII]

Estas partes de mí nunca
tiemblan, nunca flaquean,

están poseído
por la misma fuerza que tú
omitiste. Con orgullo los
llevo. Terca,
brillante, hermosa: lo soy
todo porque al ADN
que me prestaste.
Te lo debo todo a ti,
a mi luna.

[XIX]

De nada más que polvo, mi
universo fue construido.

Con las manos
cansadas, doloridas
y ojeras bajo tus ojos,
entre cenas

televisivas y leer
historias para dormir,
lo lograste.

Me diste los años más felices
de mi vida. Gracias por
los recuerdos.

[XX]

Todavía recuerdo la noche
en que me mostraste la luna.

Señalaste.

Look up, dijiste. Can you travel
that distance? Parecía bastante
lejos, y yo
prefería estar a tu lado,
así que te respondí no.
Entonces me

dijiste la distancia de
ida y vuelta, esa es tu
amor por mí.

[XXI]

Porque eso es lo que las
madres hacen: aman. Aman
como el río.

Incluso cuando está débil,
agotado, sigue fluyendo,
cantando en

la luz del sol. Te cuidan sin
testigos. En el silencio,
construyen la
memoria del amor. Y
con esto, deben hacer
sacrificios.

[XXII]

Lo veo ahora, mamá.
Veo todas las formas en
que doblaste,
y lastimaste, y rompiste
una y otra vez para
darnos una
vida. Lloro ahora por
todas las lágrimas que
contuviste.

Lo hiciste todo, solo, sin
quejas. Me enseñaste a ser
una mamá.

[XXIII]

Porque esto es lo que se

supone que deben hacer
las madres. El
día que caí del cielo, hiciste
un acuerdo.
Prometiste enseñarme
sin palabras. Y prometí
cuidar de ti
cuando creciera, te prometí
tres casas una al lado
de la otra.
[XXIV]
Pero al final, las olas
llegan. La entropía gana:
las hebras se
desenrollan siempre. El código
frágil se disuelve lentamente,
todas las vías
terminan y la célula muere.
Sin oxígeno, el fuego no
puede arder.
La llama disminuirá, hasta
que finalmente tu cerillo
se apaga.
[XXV]
Ahora hay luna nueva.
Pero su suave resplandor
siempre vuelve.
La luz enriquece la tierra
cada día, exige aumento.
Entonces, con
delicada rotación,
admira su impacto. Y

con su suave
resplandor nos envuelve y
nos dice que descansemos
esta noche.
[XXVI]
La fuerza que inició el
giro de la Tierra cesó
hace mucho
tiempo. Nuestro cuerpo celeste,
puesto en movimiento eones
antes, sigue
bailando hoy en día. Es
este principio, que pinta
con cariño
las condiciones para
prosperar la existencia
de la vida.
[XXVII]
La fuerza inicial se ha
ido y, sin embargo, yo
estoy aquí:
los dedos de los pies plantados
en la arena y la piel
calentada
por el sol. Me da paz saber
que aquí es donde querrías
estar. Mientras
la brisa salada fluye
a través de mi cabello,
puedo verte.
[XXVIII]
Las olas toman y toman,

pero sin intención. El mar
no tiene
malicia. Las olas no
saben de tu ausencia.
No saben lo
que habría sido con más
tiempo contigo aquí, con
treinta años
más de tu presencia, ni
yo tampoco. Adivinar
trae dolor.
[XXIX]
Nunca podré entenderlo,
pero hay paz en aceptar
este hecho.
Así que yo hablaré a
la luna y le mostraré
todo lo que
soy capaz de hacer. Es mi
deber llevar la fuerza que
me diste. Y
así construiré mi futuro
y viviré la vida que
no tuviste.
[XXX]
Así estoy en un viaje,
aprendiendo a vivir
sin tu guía.
Ando con tu luz, y aunque
la oscuridad toque mis
talones, no
tengo miedo. Tú vives en

mí como la savia vive
en los troncos.
Las decisiones pesan,
pero tus ojos existen
en los míos.
[XXXI]
Con cada paso, no estaré
sola. Y cada persona
que conozca
en mi camino sabrá de
ti. Sembraré tu nombre en
la tierra que
me diste. No hay duda de
que llevo un hueco que el
tiempo no
llenará. La muerte no se
puede vencer - solo andar
con su peso.
[XXXII]
La muerte ama a todos
sus hijos. No discrimina.
Todavía
no es mi amigo, pero
era tuyo. Junio - Ahí
es cuando te
dijo que iba a venir.
El mensaje no me llegó hasta
que todas las
hojas cayeron. Y él ya
había llamado a la
puerta por ti.
[XXXIII]

Vergüenza. Esta palabra es como describiría la sensación. Seis meses que supiste que te estabas muriendo y nunca me di cuenta. Seis meses que tú sufriste en silencio.

El segundo día de diciembre abriste la puerta, y saludaste a la muerte.

[XXXIV]

Y comenzó: “Oh, mi madre cansada, luchaste duro.

Tú eres muy fuerte, sin embargo, yo soy más fuerte. Sé que mi cara se ve fea, pero créeme cuando te digo que solo vengo a traerte paz.

Sé que tienes miedo. Tu biología te dicta que tengas miedo a la muerte.”

[XXXV]

“Sé que cada célula grita por vivir. Tu sangre sigue el patrón, las pulsaciones antiguas del instinto. Pero yo no soy

un castigo.

Soy el fin del esfuerzo. El umbral donde termina el dolor. Vengo, no a robar, sino como lo hace el mar después de cada marea.”

[XXXVI]

“Vengo como el sueño que llega al niño agotado a la noche.

Ves, no tengo manos, solo la certeza.

No necesitas rendirte.

Solo tienes que dejarlo ir.

La mente no quiere irse, pero son tus células las que anhelan el desorden.”

[XXXVII]

“¿Recuerdas cuando lloraste por primera vez, al nacer?

Ese grito fue tu entrada al ciclo que ahora se cierra en silencio.

El amor que sembraste ya brota en otros cuerpos. No se pierde. Así que ven conmigo ahora, déjanos irnos mientras aún estás soñando.”

[Responde La Madre]

“I know. My body is ready. I fought to continue, I fought for one more day.

But my hands are weak, and to breathe is more difficult than ever. So, just promise me that they know that there is no distance - the amount is infinite.

If they cry when the night creeps in, then remind my daughters that I persist in it.”

[Responde El Universo]

“El llanto es inevitable.

Las mejores madres deben ser lloradas.

El duelo es amor, ¿verdad?

Para aquellos llenos de amor, debe ser cierto que el duelo es inmenso. Pero, también es cierto que el duelo engendra fuerza. Ya es hora de volver lo que fue prestado.”

Fin

Dios guarda silencio en estos momentos. Es la muerte la que agarra tus manos y te

pone a descansar en la playa. Es la muerte la que llamará a mi puerta cuando el tiempo lo dicte. Y lo saludaré con paz, porque moriré siendo tu hija. Eso me basta.



Lista de contribuidores

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Let Your Vision Be World Embracing

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. Visit us at www.uafs.edu or find us on Facebook @UAFS-World Languages Department and @UAFS Azahares.

About this year's design & layout

The Art Department at UAFS puts learning into action. These students have been 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 and typesetting the entire magazine. The original cover designs that were presented to the Editorial Board appear below.



Call for Submissions Azahares 2027

At Azahares, we're looking for fresh work about the Latino 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 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 Latino world, embodying a freshness of spirit and perspective captured with this publication.

To view past issues:

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

Submissions are open to all members of the community.

To submit:

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





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*

