









# Poetry

## CORAZÓN BILINGÜE

by Brenda N. Riojas

*Sin palabras*, and without translation

perhaps I prefer the tangled  
tongue I negotiate.

Sometimes in English,  
sometimes in Spanish,

*y a veces no tengo las palabras  
para lo que pienso  
no puedo expresar para que otros me entiendan.*

I keep silent, some words  
caught between worlds  
lost in the currents of El Río Bravo  
we call the Río Grande

that connect, divide.

I open my mouth, and my words hesitate  
pulled in opposite directions.

*¿Cómo se dice?*  
How do you say what can't be said  
without altering meaning,  
without changing the song?

*Las Mañanitas que cantaba el Rey David  
no suenan igual*  
in King David's tongue.

Always I apologize for the pauses and the lost  
in the lacuna. *Dispénsame.*

Even the rhythm changes.

My pace interrupted

I pause    listen to the heart  
it beats to more than one language,  
translates all.

*El Corazón late en todos lenguajes.*

## THREE-TEN TO TULE

by Octaviano Merecias-Cuevas

*(Mixtek, Spanish, English)*

Ni'n ch'aa cha'aa ja coto nuu'dee  
Ni akanti'de in, u, uni, te ni skunu'de.  
In one minute the man reveals his uniform  
The minuteman is now a ku klux clan  
Two minutes took him to discharge his rage  
The Third minute looks at him with accusation.  
Yes, the third minutes have eyes and ears in the desert.  
When nobody but Mrs. Conscience pays attention.

Four minutes, like a doll in the sand lays Alejandro.  
Escarchas de tristezas se derraman en el cactus  
Y aquel pobre hombre blanco ríe por dentro  
Y la rabia le hierve el alma y le derrite el espíritu  
Con la conciencia en su mano y con su dignidad.  
Alejandro por los suelos queda plasmado como estatua,  
en cinco minutos, en cinco minutos.

Alejandro, Roberto whatever his name is,  
They are all the same, greasy, dirty, poor,  
Brown, short, illegal and they steal my jobs.  
Nte'nu kiroo' cha' luli, nte nu kiro vey,  
Seis minutos su rencor se levanta en vuelo  
Y se vuelve boomerang de culpa y remordiendo  
Siete minutos pasaron y siete veces se culpó.

Ocho minutos, the cholesterol rising like one thousand  
Volcanoes waiting to explode in rhythmic  
contractions  
The arteries start pumping lava rivers flowing  
from his chest to the brain, from his brain to  
the mind.  
Slowly death kisses his rifle and his hands,  
With an open chest, a big heart, a great guilt  
It falls to the sand in minute nine.

U cha' chaku de ichi nuu'a  
One shot by the guilty  
The other, guiltiness shot him.  
One soul flies over the cloud's people  
The other to the Aryan land—no man's  
land.  
Two humans from the dust of society  
become one cloud of dust lost in time.

## CACOPHONY

by Timothy M. Perez

Men get away with everything. We do the least  
and get all the credit. When our children are born  
we are congratulated with hand shakes and pats  
on the back. We are bought rounds, given cigars  
to gnaw on while our women sit at home or in  
hospital beds nursing sore ribs and itchy stitches  
in their asses. We get to gloat at our achievements,  
sleep regular hours. We get to keep our day jobs.  
Yes, we'll play with the kids, throw out garbage,  
load the dishwasher, throw in a pile of laundry,  
and maybe, just maybe change a diaper, but we  
still get to be us. Because nothing was pulled from us.  
Because nothing was taken from us. Because nothing  
will ever come dripping, steaming with life from us.  
We give only as much as we can take. We are selfish.  
We are men.

My friend sits at a great oak table; in front of her  
is a place setting for one. She pours her future  
in a tall glass, but it doesn't fill, and when she looks  
at its thick bottom she finds only her own blurred  
reflection. She is vibrant, radiant, optimistic.  
She may have forgotten the reasons why her husband  
married her. She tells me she likes crows feet and can't  
wait to earn them. She will age gracefully like whiskey  
or scotch. Any time now she will be walking through  
green corn fields or along a beach or through the badlands  
addressing the cacophony of unrealized genius.  
She'd be Kerouac, a Dharma bum, a Moriarty.  
I think of my friend and the storm that awaits her,  
and I think of her howling, and I think of Jack whom  
I never read, and I think of all the bums before me,  
and I think of all the men who will come after me,  
and I think of all the women, and I think of Ginsberg  
resting in her chest silently weeping for her.

I've never read Jack,  
but I have read *Howl*. I've never knew hunger, but my wife has. She spent  
holidays elbow to elbow with transients and addicts. She never knew  
the difference. I've never been willing to sacrifice—enough.  
I once stole from a deli I worked at. Payday was at the end  
of the month it was the third. I took two loaves of bread a three pound turkey  
breast and a five pound ham. I lived off both for weeks. I still eat ham  
and turkey and I feel lucky if both are heavily stuffed between thick slices  
of sourdough. I never knew hunger. We take for granted  
the turning of a faucet. We don't respect the process of water's resurrection,  
the ascension it makes through the sky via the sun that beckons it towards  
clouds that will shelter it and haul it off in soft pillow-y hands carting it over  
mountains only to litter the earth again and again and again. Along coastlines,  
moorings bob with the rhythm of the tide,

## NI DE AQUÍ, NI DE ALLÁ, NI DE ALLÁ

by Beatriz Herrera

Bicultural  
Bilingual  
Bicoastal

I am a proud Chicana-Riqueña  
Que habla inglés y español  
Y si no me entiendes pues  
Too bad for you.

Aprende.  
El espanglish es su propio idioma  
Con sus propias reglas

Por ejemplo:  
Mami, adónde dejé mis glasses?  
No se diría:  
Mami, where did I dejar my lentes?  
You laugh too.  
That's ridiculous.

Every year I hop on a plane  
And travel across this  
Realizing the distance  
Between my two worlds

Tacos on the West Coast  
Tostones on the East Coast  
Timba on the California  
Salsa-on-2 on the New York

La Mission San Francisco  
El Barrio, Manhattan  
Califas  
Pueblayork  
Chicana  
Nuyorican.  
Hella vs. mad.  
Ancestral wisdom versus street smarts  
Child of the corn  
Daughter of concrete.

“Ni de aquí. Ni de allá. Ni de allá.”  
Jaja, que chiste mi gente  
A curious existence to them  
Sometimes painful, to me.

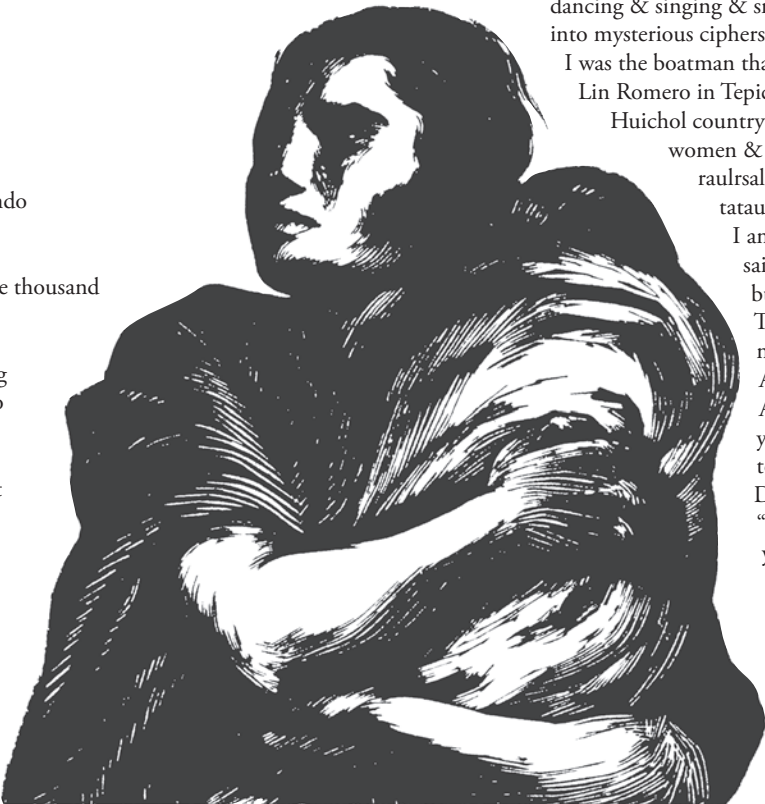
I live in the in-between.  
Built for oscillation.  
Movement.  
Never free.  
But always alive.  
Always me.

## CHANTLOVE

by Juan Felipe Herrera

*for my brothers & sister, R.I.P.*

Alfred Arteaga in a Siqueiros speckled Cubano white suit  
dancing & singing & smiling solar making words collapse  
into mysterious ciphers you said you dreamed me  
I was the boatman that took you to that other side  
Lin Romero in Tepic Nayarit 1970 on a trek to El Colorín,  
Huichol country Wixárika First Peoples you take fotos  
women & children busted maíz our lives woven forever  
raulrsalinas strolls 24th & Mission St. like always apachucado  
tataujeado dibujado with chains hanging down your tramos  
I am still in your apartment Seattle days of the 70's when you cried  
said that you had given your life away to words & hard times  
but your children you lost you said that & took a breath  
Trini Sánchez Jr. with that Detroit Motown beret you welcomed me  
made a bed for me you drove me to the reading blacks & browns  
Africa & Mexico & Latin America came together at last  
Angela de Hoyos thank you for your kindnesses for  
your front yard of Chican@ Hall of Famers so you asked me  
to press my hands on a slab of wet concrete Ray Gonzalez too  
Don Luis Leal after my reading gone comedy at UCSB you said  
“I thought you were a serious man” years later you gave me  
your chapbook on Fernández de Lizardi & walked to the podium  
Omar Salinas last time I saw you here in Riverside I noticed  
how you could mesmerize whoever faced you easy  
that's how the powers flowed from you it wasn't the poetry  
it wasn't the book or the statements it was what a Tibetan brother  
said after a puja cleansing for Daniela battling cancer in Fresno  
“God-is-life “  
breath thru paper  
chantlove





# Cosmology

JAGUAR AT HEART

by Manuel Lozano

You know me quite well,  
I'm a jaguar at heart,  
Destined to rebel  
Right from the start.  
Who ever said  
The wild were dead?  
I put out my art  
Through the sounds in my head.

The echo is loud,  
With a thunderous roar,  
We pierce the cloud  
Through the hole on the floor.  
In twisted nightmares  
We found the spiral stairs  
That would let us soar  
Out where nothing compares.

The vision is yours,  
And bright if you want,  
The night sky is the source  
Of the diamonds we flaunt.  
The black velvet adorns  
As the music now warns  
That the wolf on the hunt  
Gets pierced by the thorns.

We are souls in transit,  
Hitching a ride with the thumb,  
You can either dance it,  
Or aim your stinger and hum.  
Either way, it is flowing,  
And never easy going,  
So beat your hand painted drum  
With the wild wind now blowing.

Change is adrift,  
Lost in the sea,  
Like a sparrow so swift  
That can never be free.  
Well manipulated,  
Even fabricated,  
A consumer on a spree  
With liberty devastated.

Oh heart of mine,  
Without hesitation commits,  
To the rhythm and rhyme  
Of the pieces and bits.  
You know us quite well,  
It was always easy to foretell  
How this group of misfits  
Was destined to rebel.



DOGS OF MEXICO

by Devreaux Baker

What was it about it the dust  
That carved its way into my heart  
That spoken the unspeakable words  
of the night  
Endless tears that cause the air to stop  
That break the stones  
That whisper your name  
In every bar  
That never sleep  
That dances the dance of the newly dead  
Who do not yet realize they must cross over  
They must leave the taste of dust behind  
Forsake this land of eyes and hands  
The heat that twists its way into my hair  
Has your face  
This dream of rain  
A flood that gathers me into its arms  
These are the dogs of Mexico  
This endless roaming pack  
That stampedes my heart  
Leaves echoes of  
A thousand unnamed nights  
In your Arms.

HIJA DE LA LLORONA

by Estela de la Cruz

Oigo el viento  
chillando.

Me hiel a la sangre.

Eres tú, mamá,  
eres tú.

Mataste a mi hermano.  
Mataste a mi hermana.

Los ahogaste  
en el río  
ese día que hacía tanto frío.

Y ahora, quieres matarme a mí.

Pero, no me dejo.  
¡Corro, corro, corro!  
¡De aprisa, corro!

Me sigues, volando por el aire,  
llorando, gritando,  
“¡Hija de tu padre,  
ven aquí!”

Maldita madre,  
nunca dejaré  
que me mates.

¡Vete, vete, vete!  
¡Lárgate de aquí!







MYTH OF THE BOOGEY MAN

by Juliana Aragon Fatula

The Maya and Inca dreamed of the monster, the demon  
named Pusillanimous. The Mayan warrior went into the quag to quell  
the noise of the deep. He became raw had a  
rapt fever for feeding on the dead.  
He began to rack and ravish their bones.  
He sucked and sapped their piquant blood  
to quaff his thirst for blood.  
Ate a sapid brew of meat and skin to sate his depravity.  
He devoured their children.  
He became el Cui Cui.

ANOTHER MOMENT IN PARRADISE

by John Landry

No one need say a thing;  
the earth has said enough —

the shaking hands  
unable to fasten a sash  
to pin down change

hands complicit in the ritual

but one gobbledygook serves  
as well as another  
when devising one’s own  
ground rules for sanity

Who can pin the tail  
on the latest donkey?  
and does the latest donkey  
have a powerful kick?

the earth and sea offer  
both challenge and inquiry.



LIGHTNING’S SON

by Miguel Robles

There was a time  
when a Jaguar was not just a cat  
but a god fed by the lava of the volcano  
godchild of meteor’s rage  
lightning’s son

Heart of rock  
obsidian claws  
skin of serpentine jade

He did not hide in the thicket  
he walked proudly through the centuries  
lord and chief of all mortals  
revealing to his subjects  
the secrets of war and sacrifice

Owner of the night  
he was the terror of the unfaithful  
a quick whip  
an executioner of cowards  
incorruptible creator of all the ordeals  
that befell the villages for lack of loyalty

Kings and princesses  
gave tribute to his lineage  
to his empire of shadows and punishment

There were days in which the wind dared to speak  
but was silenced by a roar from the possessor of sound

His dark sight undermined any chance of rebellion  
adversaries he exterminated with just a whistle

Until the day came  
when he was erased from our school books  
and now we only see him at the zoo in a cage

FLOR Y CANTO

by Xico González C/S

Flor y canto  
Flower and song  
Palabras de revolución  
Songs of freedom  
Freedom-libertad-liberación  
Sol y luna  
luna y sol-alma-soul-soledad  
100 años, muchos más  
de masacres y silencios  
pero como Ricardo Sánchez  
canto y grito mi liberación  
My words are bullets  
mi boca el cuete  
Caute ponte  
“Al alba, trucha y abusado”  
dice el profe Montoya  
Hueytlatoni del in xóchitl in cuicatl

Flor y Canto  
Flower and song  
Quetzalcoatl  
God of wisdom, poetry and the wind...  
lleva al cielo palabras proféticas  
que se extienden to the four corners of the world  
white, red, black and blue  
is the sky where the black eagle flies  
¿Qué queremos?  
¡Justicia!  
¿Cuándo?  
¡Ahora!...  
Es el tiempo de levantarte y gritar  
¡Basta! ¡Basta! ¡Bastaaaaa!  
Screams Phil Goldvarg

Zapatista warrior de Sacras...  
Soy yo y tú – Inlakex-  
Pensamiento serpentino maya  
Escribió Luis Valdez  
During the Chicano Movement  
Ollín that has come full circle  
and we are fighting the same battles todavía  
—opresión, racismo, clasismo y todos los -ismos  
que te llevan al abismo...  
vas que corres  
con gobernantes como Bush y el terminator  
wants to terminate programs like EOP  
¡Chingao!

Flor y canto  
Flower and song  
Huitzilopochtli  
God of war  
dame las palabras para luchar  
Paz y revolución  
Ometeotl  
dualidad divina  
of justice and truth  
Justicia y verdad  
palabras de igualdad  
Equality  
should not be a noun  
sino un verbo en acción

Flor y canto  
Flower and song  
In xóchitl in cuicatl  
Poeta = profeta  
Flor y canto  
Flower and song  
Con safos y ¿qué?

# ROOTS



## A LETTER FOR YELLOWJACKET ROAD

by Yezmin Villarreal

Waking up to the day, frigid, fresh prickly pear on my chest,  
There's poetry in each word that you struggle to speak.  
Your hands crossed 'cross you as if you lay dead at the crest

Of mountains that were your blanket of salvation in a nest.  
The 911 emergency was you running to find meaning in a shriek,  
waking up to the day, frigid, fresh prickly pear on my chest.

T-shirt torn above the brow of your nipple but lest  
not forget that you won't remember this hand all meek.  
Your hands crossed 'cross you as if you lay dead at the crest

of our Sinai top. A place where spirits speak in tongue to test  
ghost women who witness the roaming testimony reeking.  
Waking up to the day, frigid, fresh prickly pear on my chest.

The goat herder and the Israelite with fig breasts  
told stories of snakes who opened a man's chest in a week.  
your hands crossed 'cross you as if you lay dead at the crest.

Sinner man breathe out fear by loving the sinners best,  
shipwrecked rock stacking carcasses atop widow's peak.  
Waking up to the day, frigid, fresh prickly pear on my chest,  
Your hands crossed 'cross you as if you lay dead at the crest.

## CACRI IN CARACAS

by Jack Hirschman

In the guaicaipuro shanty-down-town in the Sarria  
district bang  
in the shadow  
of high-rise Caracas,

Cacri jazz!  
Mongrel jazz for that's what cacri means:  
mongrels who go from dumpster to dumpster scavenging.  
That's what they call themselves: Pablo,  
Jose, Irvin, Max Lenin, the who Armandos, Dario and  
Jesus-this band of banditos in a room just big enough  
to hold them and their instruments  
blaring, destining and flowering out  
a rapture of mouths and drum-hands,  
flapping guitars and thunder-plucked bass.

The narrow alleyway just outside's got its ear to the door.

The guys swinging for Jalagi Allison and me from the states;  
they on their feet, we asquat on the floor,  
all of us at home in a homeless world  
racing to and from that point where all  
contact and harmony and whirlwind  
sounds begins.

They start and they go! We go, you go too, Hugo!  
In the rain of cats and cacri,  
with hardly room, and all that space!  
With hardly food, and all that funky  
fishsoup in the drum-tureen,  
sassafrass in the saxes.

The people by sound united  
by rhythms of hope,  
from Pythagorean to Coltraen  
to Bolivarian free-form poetry  
will never be defeated!.

Cacri! Cacri! Cacri! Cacri!  
What a mix, what minx-mastered licks,  
what chaps to feed the belly of sweet poverty's heart!

## YOU CALL

by Nellie Wong

You call my name, Neh-leeeee, Neh-leeeee,  
your voice subdued as mellow wine  
and I jump from the kangaroo's pocket  
To be your walking cane.

I, a glutinous riceball, stick to you  
for if I sour, you will latch on  
to the moon  
in your night flight.

In your bath you turn from me  
not because your beasts are tiny buttons  
not because your dresses fit the fat lady  
at the circus, but because  
you wear your modesty  
a necklace of jade.

What do I say  
when your neighbors ask about you?  
Why do they ask me  
when they live next door?  
Have they abandoned you like a little bitch  
whose urine is dark as beets?

But there are angels  
(or are angels Chinese?)  
who cook your rice gruel as they too  
wade in heated streams.

Ah, but do they not need you  
as you need them  
and have you not hooked up in space,  
brushstrokes filling the skies,  
waiting for your own inkwells  
to be filled?

*(This poem was published in  
THE DEATH OF LONG STEAM LADY,  
Nellie Wong, West End Press, 1986).*



## LA CONSAGRACIÓN DEL CAFÉ

by Rafael Jesús González

*a monseñor Óscar A. Romero*

Un día de dios  
en mi patio tomando café  
nada es normal o  
ni el alcatraz  
con su pene dorado  
ni el iris  
como lava morada  
que derrama un volcán.  
Encuentro en el fondo de la taza  
casullas bordadas  
de mariposas negras  
y guindas manchas o  
el sol dispara  
centellas de balas plateadas  
y de cirios ahogados o  
hay sangre en su brillar.  
Pongo la burda taza en su platillo  
con un tierno cuidado  
como si fuera cáliz  
y digo la letanía:  
Guatemala  
Nicaragua  
El Salvador.  
Y un lado del corazón  
me sabe blanco y dulce  
como la caña  
y el otro,  
como el café,  
negro y amargo.

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## CONSECRATION OF COFFEE

by Rafael Jesús González

*to monsignor Oscar A. Romero*

One day of god  
drinking coffee in my patio  
nothing is normal ó  
not the calla  
with its penis of gold  
nor the iris  
like purple lava  
a volcano spills.  
I find in the depths of the cup  
chasubles embroidered  
with black moths  
& red stains ó  
the sun fires  
a scintillation of silver bullets  
& of candles drowned ó  
there is blood in its shine.  
I place the cup on its saucer  
with a most tender care  
as if it were a chalice  
& say the litany:  
Guatemala  
Nicaragua  
El Salvador  
& one side of my heart  
tastes white & sweet  
like cane sugar  
& the other,  
like coffee,  
bitter & black.





THE OCEAN BRINGS GREAT THINGS

by Tomás Huitzilcohuatl Lucero

The Mexican immigrants  
from whom I’ve come to collect rent  
stand in a dark house  
in the winter  
surrounding René, their patriarch,  
who halts our conversation  
about seaports in Los Angeles, and Tampico,  
where he has worked, to announce:

“The ocean brings great things  
for those who bathe and frolic in it.  
Each wave is a tale from overseas.”

René is a wave-spirit from Veracruz  
turning to salt, and breeze, and foam  
in the underground of our country,  
where he works in the shadows.

Tonight his dining table  
is an ocean unto itself  
breaking on the beach  
of my muddy conscience.

“I live happily,” he continues.  
“There is no need to pity me.  
Look on to me!  
Look on the people that surround me!”

The way  
in which his embattled,  
teenage daughters love him,  
his wife stands by him,  
his fellow refugees support him,  
touches me.

He hasn’t been to our beaches yet.  
But I’ll take him, on the balmiest day this summer.  
And then I’ll ask,  
“What have the shores told you?”

The murmur of the beach is not in vain.  
It is a constant cry, a hell-bent howl,  
an echo from the open mouth  
of the serpentine world.  
Listen to the waves!  
Listen to China, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran,  
Palestine, Honduras, North Korea!  
Listen to the fertile land of your own heart.

ESPERANZA MUERE EN LOS ÁNGELES

by Jorge Tetl Argueta

*a mi prima Esperanza muerta en Los Angeles  
el 26 de mayo de 1990*

Tengo una prima  
que salió huyendo  
de la guerra  
una prima que pasó  
corriendo de la migra  
por los cerros de Tijuana  
una prima que llegó a Los Ángeles  
escondida en el baúl de un carro  
una prima que hoy se muere  
se muere lejos de El Salvador  
Pobre mi prima Esperanza  
no la mató la guerra  
la mató la explotación  
\$50 miserables dólares a la semana  
40 horas a la semana  
Pobre mi prima Esperanza  
se está muriendo en Los Ángeles  
muerta la van a enviar a El Salvador  
Pobre mi prima Esperanza  
dicen que sufrió un derrame  
y que su hija piensa  
que su madre sueña  
sueña que está en El Salvador  
Pobre mi prima Esperanza  
ya se murió  
ya la mataron  
En un cajón negro  
se va hoy para su patria  
Pobre mi prima Esperanza  
salió huyendo de la guerra  
y muerta la envían a la guerra  
Pobre mi prima Esperanza  
hoy se va a su tierra a descansar  
con sus hermanos  
todos los muertos  
de la misma guerra



NIÑEZ CIEGA

by Sabine Huynh

Soy de una niñez sin nieve.  
Todos los días trenes huían  
cruzando campos de hierba  
seca. Una niña de rincón,  
niña jugando en el corazón  
de una ciudad gris y grave.  
¿Por qué la llamaron “Mis Ojos”?  
El miedo de piedras malvadas  
brillaba en los de perros sucios.

Una niñez de polvo de lana.  
Siempre flotaba en nuestra casa.  
Se callaba la calle cuando  
volvíamos mis hermanos y yo.  
Silencios como gritos subían  
las escaleras que crujían  
tristemente hasta mi cuarto.

Podía ver el jardín soñando  
de flores, imaginando que  
mis hermanos llegarían a  
las cerezas verdes y duras  
antes de los pájaros negros.

Nunca gastaba mi dinero  
de bolsillo en bagatelas  
alegres. Con ésto intenté  
comprar el amor de mi madre  
enferma apagada loca.  
Cumpleaños, día de las madres,  
navidad, le ofrecía jabón  
de rosa para que cuidase  
de la suavidad de su piel  
que nunca me dejó tocar.

*Barcelona, el 18 de febrero 2007.*

THE ONE DAY CAFÉ

by Mary Rudge

Someday (Maybe today)  
you may be in a café  
the menu will say  
“Meattreatsweeteat”  
But you  
see two eggs as eyes socketless in  
El Salvador,  
the cream with these screams.  
Colombian coffee, the bean  
detached at its thick red,  
detached hand bled.  
Unfolding the napkin  
the belly distended,  
starvation, the drought  
in Africa, the dead  
along the road,  
the dried riverbed,  
their meatless ribs  
lay... “barbecue, fillet,  
heart, tender...” skin flayed,  
the tortured prisoner.  
“Something more?”  
the waitress will say.  
“Eat,” your friend will say,  
“my treat. Eat.” The waitress will say  
“Do you want change?”  
The waitress will say “come back soon.”  
The menu will say,  
complete  
dinner  
complete.  
Tears salt in your spoon.

[UNTITLED]

by John Ross

The moon  
Plump as a guayava,  
Plays peekaboo  
With the cornices  
Of the old convent  
Across Isabel la Católica street  
Where once gargoyles leered down  
At unsuspecting pedestrians  
Until the earthquake  
Topped them from their perch  
Instantly crushing  
Those who never had time  
To look up  
At the shattering sky.

A full generation  
After that terrible day,  
The fat moon  
Washes the broken street  
In lemon-colored light  
And picks up the pieces

MUJER SALVADOREÑA

by Jacqueline Méndez

Eres mujer salvadoreña  
Con orgulloso y malicioso caminar,  
Frente en alto, mirada firme

Eres como el maíz, la harina de arroz,  
El chicharrón, el frijol,  
El queso y el loroco.  
Eres ingrediente indispensable de tu tierra

Eres poderosa como el sol  
Resistente como el palo de amate,  
Y tu corriente es más fuerte que la de Comalapa

Eres mestiza, de piel:  
Morena, canela, bronceada, y blanca  
De cabelleras:  
Negras como el carbón  
Castañas como el barro  
Y amarillas como el maíz.

Mujer de baja estatura, pero de alta gracia  
Eres el acento guanaco al hablar

Coces el maíz  
Mueles el arroz,  
Y revuelves el queso con el chicharrón  
Tus manos palmean la masa,  
Aplaudiendo tu descendencia indígena pipil—  
Sobreviviente de la cultura Maya.

Coces mis memorias en el comal  
Y revuelves mi conciencia en tu realidad  
Las pupusas,  
Regalo exquisito de tu ser.  
Mujer querida amada y aplaudida,  
Por esta hermana que te admira,  
Y en la distancia,  
Te obsequia estos humildes y sinceros versos,  
Inspirados por tu espíritu de mujer salvadoreña

## by Melinda Palacio

Santa Barbara, discarded bell.  
 Santa Barbara, dethroned saint, calendar  
 Santa Barbara, city of the Old Mission,  
 Santa Barbara, twin bell towers, red.

From my round capped home, see  
the ocean, a holy shade of blue, beyond  
San Nicolas, once home to another  
lost woman, christened Juana Maria.

Your bare feet never walked  
on smooth adobe floors. Your  
robes never soaked in spouting  
water from a bear totem, our  
Chumash lavanderia.

## by Tomas Riley

with eyes ablaze  
the music of the waves  
breaks at their feet  
like an unrepentant marching song  
of doves locked in a row

master of fact all sliding now  
on crows feet  
(*drop that beat one time*)  
this beachscape exodus familiar

freestyled on this horizon  
with a flow so hot  
it sparked the rising sun  
*(the dawn becomes you)*

we have been  
here before

we must be  
here  
again

## by Gerardo Pacheco

drinking *un chingo* de beer,  
smoking some *chingadera*,  
living one more *chingada* n

*chingados* with nothing to *chingar*, but with the whole *chingado* world for them all.

they are our *chingonsisimos*  
erudites; fearless *chingones*  
sleeping con la *chingada*;

*chingones chingandose*  
in those *chingados* alleys;  
*un chingo* of *chingaderas*  
*chingando* those *chingados*;



## by Melanie Gonzalez

Tu piel,  
la masa suave de maíz de las  
pupusas más ricas, tu calor es  
lo del comal que calienta tortilla.  
Quisiera comerte como un elote  
de la calle

chupo mis dedos y pienso en ti

## by Cathy Arellano

if the savvy entrepreneur doesn't stop you  
when you pass the paperback books  
of his crack mart spread on a tarp  
between the falafel place and roxie theater

the tamale lady doesn't nod to her cooler  
when you rise from the bart cave  
the flores lady doesn't wave a bouquet  
when you're ordering at la taquería

if the cristianos don't alleluia you  
invite you to their storefront for salvation  
hand you a free Watchtower  
or awake magazine

the palatero doesn't ring his bell  
when he passes you  
the fruit lady doesn't offer elote, mango  
when you pass her

if a señora doesn't accept your offer of help  
with her bolsas of food  
or the lady with a baby  
doesn't take your seat on the 14

the man with the red painted face  
doesn't smile at you  
the woman with baby powdered eyelashes  
doesn't blink at you

if somebody passes by and doesn't speak to you in english  
mexican puerto rican cuban or south american spanish  
spanglish caló a dialect of mayan quiché quechua  
tagalog vietnamese cantonese mandarin samoan

get yourself to 16th or 24th  
take the steps two at a time  
feed the machine a couple bucks  
punch yourself a one-way ticket

but if one of these things has happened to you  
the next time you're on mission street  
don't be so stuck up  
say hi





MEMORIES OF A PEACEFUL WARRIOR

by Roberto Ariel Vargas

Pops always had a pistol in his waistband  
Since before my birthday

I remember him pissed when I worked with gangsters in the Mission  
(for peace)  
And not packing a pistol, just in case

I explained: these are different times  
Not sure he was convinced

I remember training for war  
Karate classes at Mission Cultural Center  
KIIAAIII!!!  
We were ALL in training...  
Mama, sisters, primos...

Running laps around Bernal Heights, montaña sagrada  
Chato and Lucha, the German Shepards  
Pop in his combat boots would take off running up the mountain, as if  
racing to freedom  
...he never stopped running  
...he never reached freedom  
even after we won(?) the war...

I remember sessions of Win Chun  
lasted for hours...  
sweat glistening wherever skin showed  
the intensity of their focus  
Chombo, Saul, Gato, Armando, El Poeta  
Toño El Gringo who never came back from the war to die on the streets of East Los

I remember the women crying as they watched film of the guerrilla in the mountains,  
they knew who the faces were, behind the red and black panuelos  
They knew which ones were dead

I remember rifles in the closet  
And learning how to shoot, but I can't remember which time was the first  
I won't even let my kids play with toy guns  
But I will never be without one

I remember the first time I had a cop's gun to my head  
And the first time I was beaten by a cop for speaking out against someone else's beating  
I remember the last time a cop beat me while I wore handcuffs  
—I decided it would be the last time, for the first time

And the first time I tried to kill someone  
Which was the last time I carried a knife

I remember the first time I knew my friend killed someone  
But I forget the first time my friend was killed  
(who was last?)

I can't remember the first brown boy I tried to help  
Who I later had to bury  
Or the last  
But I remember a few in between

I remember when I thought it was time for me to go to the mountains  
Because that's what I had been trained to do

To never speak over the phone about pop's location  
Or who was home  
Never put my back to the door  
watch the eyes of those who approach  
don't go into the dark unarmed  
stand your ground

But mama taught me unconditional love  
Even though she was an ass kicking woman

I remember the first time she learned I would kill for her  
She taught me that life is precious  
even though she grabbed the knife first...

I struggle to define my approach  
With the newest hearts my genetics offer to history

My babies struggle to reconcile our self-defensive home with their pacifist school

Just as I  
work to be a warrior for peace  
ready for war  
A peace activist  
Prepared for violence  
Too strong to be passive  
Too peaceful to be violent  
Non-violent but armed  
Armed but not dangerous  
Dangerous because I want peace  
Doing battle  
Against war  
Fighting for Community Policing  
Against Police Brutality (Fuck the Police)

Self Critical  
If hypocritical

Driven by my own worse violence  
To work for the best peace

DESPIERTA

by Leticia Hernández-Linares

Mission street yawns wide  
under the canopy of breaking day  
out of breath footsteps tax rickety ladder rungs  
chase streams of light unveiling the horizon  
Sleepy hands burning sage on tar rooftop  
the day just barely born  
into my desert dusted arms wanting  
to hold a neighborhood hostage  
from itself

What a perfect mission these streets have become  
shoveling out plots for graves, lots for sale  
A concentric circle of conquest carving itself  
into a ground overcrowded with the whispering of ghosts

If I charge the children with painting poems sobre las paredes,  
will you learn to love yourself, curl up from the crouching  
towards death stance you slag around the streets in,  
cease the fire that barrels holes through the heads of young men guilty  
of nothing but brown skin and being on foot  
no car to speed past the candle lit processing of their own untimely deaths

But down la calle Valencia, la piedra del sol bounces  
off the hands of a Chicana architect, shines over the open doors  
of a community space for learning  
Comedores baring plates steaming with home country recuerdos,  
cast shadows in just lit enough hallways, connecting  
writers to their next verse, lovers to inevitable missteps  
Little girl footsteps walk me back through yearly visits  
to this place where a Salvadoran Buddhist found a stray,  
and sent him south to lick the wounds of a family  
talking in broken sentences, the uncle  
who fell me in love with the grassy hill  
bright buildings poked by cold edges, below

Prayers printed on the feet of danzantes  
resound through each block  
where I have learned how to make crying count,  
counted murals counting wars cried close to corners  
where someone keeps dying for nothing, nodded  
while the whispering of poets sings truth into sense  
calling each day to attention  
with the promise  
of sunrise  
and sanctuary



KNOW THE NAMES OF THINGS

by Lorna Dee Cervantes

*for immigrants everywhere anytime*

Know the names of things.  
How 3+1 equals nada  
in a barrio flat. How many  
unknowns there are in a single  
bottle of pills. How much  
it costs to breath through  
the nicotine, the anxiety,  
the three times a million lost  
nickels in the foreign exchange,  
in a bushel of sterile seed.

Know the names of things.  
How to live. How to love  
the you in all. How to call  
out to the impoverished ancestors.  
How to feed a future. Call  
it what you will. Call power  
in a name. Name the world  
to own it. Learn hammer  
and sickle. Learn the many  
names for drought. Name the  
expedient past, the succumbing future.  
Name what you will. Will what  
you name. The power of the tsunami  
in the syllables of truth, the reconstruction  
of the hurricane in the uplifting vowels.  
Learn the names of all the treaties  
never honored by our government.  
Name the dead, too.

Know the names of things.  
How to count. Count the many ways  
life changes life and death  
changes nothing and never gives.  
There is a way if you name  
it. If you follow it the road

will come. Be the strings that hold  
up this house of time held  
by the wisdom of the abuelas  
with words holding taut the strands.  
In the beginning was an absence.  
Name that, too.

Know the names of things.  
How to tell the singer  
from the song. How to swear  
on a star, become the jury  
of one. How to tell over  
the cacophony of a thieving  
crow. How to chant the mastery  
of who enslaves whom, who orders  
the gun, the bomb, the shock  
and awesome truth. Name this, too.

Know the names of things:  
auricle from ventricle, aorta  
from vena cavae, arteries from  
aurioles; all matters of the heart.  
Save with the words for it.  
Then be it, a savior  
with your words. We,  
the named, we, knowers  
know the power, the power to name,  
to see, to know, belongs  
to the perceiver, the receiver  
of knowledge ~ all in a name:  
our name, your name, the stolen  
names, the original names,  
the slaughtered names, the slaughtering  
names, names for The People for people  
who need no names, who need food,  
who need the crystal water  
because 3+1 in a barrio flat  
equals nada. Name this, too.

Know the names of things.  
and heal.





FOR THE “CAPITOL NINE”

by Francisco X. Alarcón

To the nine students who were arrested  
on April 20, 2010 at the Arizona  
State Capitol for protesting SB 1070

carnalitos  
y carnalitas  
brothers  
and sisters:

from afar  
we can hear  
your heart beats

they are  
the drums  
of the Earth

our people  
follow closely  
your steps

as warriors  
of justice  
and peace

you take on  
the Beast  
of hatred

the unlawful  
police enforcement  
of discrimination

chain yourselves  
to the doors  
of the State Capitol

so that terror  
will not leak out  
to our streets

your voices  
your actions  
your courage

can’t be taken  
way from us  
and put in jail

you are nine  
young warriors  
like nine sky stars

you are the hope  
the best dreams  
of our nation

your faces  
are radiant  
as the Sun

they will break  
this dark night  
for a new day

yes, carnalitas  
and carnalitos:  
all our sisters  
all our brothers

need no papers  
to prove once  
and for all

“we are humans  
just like you are—  
we are not criminals”

our plea comes to  
“No to criminalization!  
Yes to legalization!”

STRANGE FRUTA

by Mamacoatl

“Southern trees bares a strange fruit  
Blood at the leaves and blood at the root...”

But the southern fence  
Bears an even stranger sight  
Dismembered human bodies  
Multiplying on both sides  
Thousands and thousands of migrants  
Funneled through the desert left to die  
The pears rotted in the orchard this year  
No hummingbirds arrived.  
They were hunted down by the Minute Men  
Another act of patriotism to save  
America the blessed  
From those dirty Mexicans,  
From those terrorists, from those jornaleros  
Over there pissing on the corner  
No shame, I tell you, no education  
Stealing the jobs, stealing the dreams of America

Typical scene of a border town  
No civil rights, no rights at all  
Neoliberal thinking and the NAFTA trade  
Unleashed an epidemic of femicidal rage  
Morenita linda, niña de Guatemala,  
Obrera en Cd Juárez,  
En Nogales o Tijuana  
Your sacred body gang raped and torn to pieces  
Scattered all around and consumed  
By everyone  
Your legs were recently found  
Buried in the desert sand  
Your heart and kidneys were flown to New York  
For a very pricey transplant  
Your spinal column ended up at an MD conference in Phoenix, Arizona  
Courtesy of UCLA, due to an overflow of body parts  
And don’t nobody knows why  
The film of the brutal attack is sold in Europe and in the United States  
And business is doing great, letting us all live in disgrace....

...”Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck  
Here is a strange and bitter crop.”

LA FRONTERA: AQUÍ SOÑAMOS DE MEZCLA

by Ire’ne Lara Silva

“In recent years it has become fashionable to write and talk about borders  
and borderlands, often metaphorically. It is important that we remember that  
borders are also real, physical places... (with) very tangible consequences for  
those living along the border.”

—Yolanda Chavez-Leyva

we dream of home  
and ‘to belong’  
we dream of borders  
border crossings  
recrossings  
of differences  
highways taking us ‘to’  
not ‘from’  
transformations and symbols born anew

we forget the riverbeds  
forget the desert children,  
cocooned by stilled motherbodies  
traincars hot then cold  
with breath and suffocation  
bullets fired from anxious guns  
ignorant of nationality or life  
graves sunken ten  
bodies deep  
the gnarled branches and their  
rope black ringed scars  
the quiet(?) cages of malnutrition  
miseducation suspicion  
on the border there are bodies  
with these brown  
light/dark/medium  
bodies we dream  
of mezcla and mestizaje  
melting braiding languages  
we dream of fusion  
combustion  
believe in the fertility of chispas  
the rolling inevitability of change  
this land this sun this sky these hands

but don’t forget  
the border is littered  
with bodies laying at crossed angles  
a barbed wire fence of flesh  
and bone



MMGR



TESOROS

by Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs

They were born to be treasures  
raised to shine — Ponce de Leon’s gold

Their mothers built tesoros  
to give of themselves  
wherever they went  
“to be useful”  
was their first prayer

They traversed the interstices of the mind  
leaving their loved ones with stored hugs and kisses for  
knowing the power of beauty is less than the power of

They left to come sell themselves for \$50 a day

¿What does it mean to be a stranger when you were a  
treasure?  
To sing when you work,  
to cry for friends when you leave  
and to allow others to cry for you  
to feel that you are a treasure of life — anywhere you

¿What does it mean to turn from being a guest and be

an alien by well-meaning mission volunteers  
who feed you  
when you were born to plant your feet  
on the ground of all those who meet you —  
you were sentenced by your culture  
to package hospitality in your arms and teeth  
Instead, you have gone from guest to ghost  
from tesoro to velorio

a presence in the dark  
waiting to shine, como tesoro





forever,  
of love

raised to be a

go

become a ghost?



I AIN’T NO IMMIGRANT

by Christopher Carmona

While listening to a poet from Wisconsin  
tell me that she is just like us  
because she moved to this Mexican borderland  
and she feels like an immigrant too  
All I can think is,  
I ain’t no immigrant, guera  
I have always been here.  
This river ain’t no border  
This water flows freely  
I ain’t no mojado, gringa  
I didn’t come here from across the sea  
I have always been here.  
Before the Americans  
Before the Mexicanos  
Before the Spanish  
I tended this land  
I drank from this river  
I spoke a language I don’t remember.  
I ain’t illegal here.  
I don’t need papers  
to tell me that I belong  
because I don’t belong  
not to these United States.  
Not to your America.  
I have the blue passport  
but I ain’t the right color.  
I ain’t no immigrant, ese  
I didn’t break into anyone’s home  
kill everyone inside  
and claim God told me to.  
I ain’t illegal here.  
I didn’t build forts on your shores  
and tell you that you are now  
members of the Karankawas Nation.  
I AIN’T no immigrant aki.  
I have always been HERE.

THE IMMIGRANT

by Genny Lim

In honor of the lives lost crossing the Border and Canal:  
Who is the immigrant?  
You or I?  
Asleep between the wings  
of day and night  
This bird caught in flight  
keeps singing her song  
though no one traps her echo  
I heard her lyric braided in the  
barbed wire around the hollow stems  
along the canal at dawn where I saw  
the shimmering flowers  
clothed in jeans and tee-shirts  
shaming the constellation  
“Take me to myself!” they seemed to cry  
“I have no mother to birth me here!  
Take me to where the sun rises in my manhood!  
To where the moon fashions my lover’s eyes!  
Take off my soaked collar, my shoes  
Take my backpack and banished suitcase  
I left for tomorrow!  
What need have I for sorrow on this journey?  
What need have I for dreams or love songs?  
Light passes between each breath  
but this river of stones will not deny the  
border between my hand and yours  
between life and death  
Love is the only branch to which I cling  
What need have I for

LA REGLA DE LADRONES

by Avotcja

La Frontera  
Grandísima fantasía  
Laberinto malvado  
Una monstruosidad increíble  
Una mentira mortal  
Hecho de alucinaciones santificadas  
La Frontera  
Una línea imaginaria  
Nacida de la muerte y una dieta de miseria  
Esta pesadilla venenosa  
Fortificada de un montón de codicia  
Solamente una sog a moderna de hipocresía ilimitada  
Una ilusión cruel  
La Frontera  
Un cuchitril lleno de bobería desmoralizada  
Una casa grande creada de robo  
Y nadando

ON ISSUES OF ALIENS AND IMMIGRATION

by devorah major

truth be told we are  
all aliens now  
traveling in outer space  
are our rocky, blue sea planet

only a few of us stayed nestled  
in the belly of our ancestors’ birthing  
on the lips our mother’s womb

all of the rest of us have traveled  
to here where our heads now sleep  
to where our children grow and flourish  
or wither and perish

but once we all were natives

long before the ones  
whose names we have forgotten  
began their trek

we all were natives

before the ones who stayed  
stopped telling stories  
of we who had left

eons ago we had no questions  
about who was our kin

everyone was related

then we began to travel  
turned each the other  
into opposites  
becoming and creating  
aliens

we traverse this planet  
near the edge of our dark milky galaxy.  
rotate steadily circling one sun  
ghosted by one moon  
in concert with no less than eight planets

we revolve with and without each other  
some times meet meteors  
who whistle through star dust  
creating craters  
sand storms  
lake beds  
depositing minerals  
and fossilized ameoba

and as we travel  
comets sail by  
their tails shimmering  
hot smokey ice

and as we move past comets  
moving past us  
we see stars fall  
from the sky and marvel  
at being in the middle  
of all these galactic wonders

thus we are travel  
with and as aliens  
in outer space on this planet  
where we live

and everywhere we stay  
we are surrounded  
by other voyagers  
like and unlike us

i know  
i’ve always been an outsider  
amidst immigrants  
beside aliens  
next to strangers  
just like you

En bañeras calientes de lágrimas  
importadas  
La Frontera  
Una línea pá esconder un concepto  
artificial  
Alrededor de vallas invisibles  
Muros transparentes pá proteger  
tierras robadas  
La Frontera  
Dos palabras endiabladas  
Dos palabras malvadas  
Dos palabras sucias  
Reglas de  
Ladrones bestiales que no tienen  
derecho de existir  
En la tristeza indescriptible del  
corazón  
De esta vieja Poeta negra