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## Through Other I's: Las Otras

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Through Other I's: Las Otras

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
in  
Film, Theatre and Communication Arts  
Creative Writing

by

Brenda Nettles Riojas

B.A. A&I University, 1987

May, 2012

## **Dedication**

For my sisters, toda mis hermanas  
y Cesar, el hombre que apoya mis palabras y mi independencia

## Acknowledgments

First, I give thanks to the *Creator Spiritus*.

I would also like to thank Bill Lavender for bringing me to this point in my writing journey. Beginning with our meeting in Madrid, Spain in the summer of 2007, Bill pushed me to write, to experiment, and most of all to let the words breathe and take flight. Throughout the process, the University of New Orleans Low Residency Program provided the perfect mix of academics and workshops as I focused on the art of writing. It was inspiring to work with Peter Thompson in Madrid, Spain and again in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico; John Gery at Brunnenburg Castle in Dorf Tirol, Italy at the Ezra Pound Center for Literature; Kay Murphy in the online workshops; and Susan Schultz in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. I am humbled as well to have worked with so many talented poets including Katherine Durham Oldmixon, Anny Ballardini, and Tiare Picard.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	v
Introduction .....	1
¿Cómo que Anónimas y Olvidadas?.....	9
What do you mean anonymous and forgotten? .....	9
Before Crossing .....	10
Corazón Bilingüe .....	11
Hija de la Tierra .....	12
Desert Goddesses .....	13
En la Vanguardia.....	14
Letter to a Young Traveler .....	17
From Here in the Sabaña .....	18
Que Pase la Canícula.....	19
In Time for the Harvest .....	20
Saliendo de Viaje .....	21
Refuge Seekers .....	22
En Casa Oscar Romero .....	23
El Camino que Sigue.....	24
Hincada, La Más Sanguinaria.....	26
No Time for the Submissive.....	27
The Gospel of Repentance.....	28
Shoes for Juliancito, a Backpack for Karlita .....	29
La Tía Hermana .....	30
The Prophet’s Daughter.....	31
What the Soldiers Give Us .....	32
My Name is Lai Di.....	34
La Panadería .....	35
In Modern Times.....	36
Until Vaudeville Returns.....	37
Memory in the Glow of a Candle .....	38
Los Arrullos de la Revolución.....	39
Beyond Las Viboras Ranch .....	40
Immortal .....	41
Sculpteur.....	42
La Undécima Musa, “La Reina de la Noche” .....	43
Please Don’t Tell the Nuns.....	44
Off the Canvas .....	45
Vermillion Marked.....	46
Ya Se Acerca La Hora.....	47
Conquistada y Juzgada .....	49
At the Triple City Bingo.....	51
Works Cited.....	52
Vita.....	53

## Abstract

The “I” speaks in each of the poems presented; but whose I? The collection explores the use of personae, and gives voice to “the other” I’s/*las otras*, women who came before us and those who walk among us. Sometimes in English, sometimes in Spanish, sometimes the voices cross between languages. Written primarily in free verse, the poems are ordered to allow the mingling of languages from the speakers on the page. Through other eyes, some of the characters revive the past, speak from the grave. They provide a glimpse into what lies beyond the “I.” We hear the women, their advice, their reflections, their stories. In taking on the different personae, the poet relinquishes her voice. However, some I’s leave us guessing as to who is speaking, and how much has the poet intertwined of her own voice.

Bilingual, Personae, Borders, Spanish, Poetry, Identity

## Opening Doors: On Becoming Another

*Que el verso sea como una llave que abra mil puertas...*

El Poeta Chileno Vicente Huidobro, *Arte Poetica*

“I open my mouth, and my words hesitate / pulled in opposite directions.” These lines from the poem “Corazón Bilingüe” included in the collection that follows, offer a hint of the struggle to speak in just one language. However, the “tangled tongue I negotiate,” referred to in the same poem, runs deeper and goes beyond language. It edges the border of what can and cannot be said by a Hispanic, Catholic, mother, wife. The use of a persona in the poems allows for exploration and expression, a migration away from the familiar and away from self-censorship. The I in the poem becomes an artificial construct and creates distance between the poet and the speaker in the poem. The mask creates a safety zone, “That one may hide from terror of judgment...” (35), William Butler Yeats wrote in his essays *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*. The challenge for a poet con una “alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,” (Anzaldua 99) lies in remaining detached from the I’s.

Gloria Anzaldua in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Meztiza*, addresses the issue of “Una lucha de fronteras/A struggle of borders” (99). She notes, “The mestiza’s dual or multiple personality is plagued by psychic restlessness” (100). The issue of borders is among the central themes in the collection, as is language and the need speak without restraint. Yo crecí en la frontera. I grew up on both sides of the border that connects the United States with Mexico. We crossed the river with two names – the Rio Grande/el Rio Bravo, from Brownsville, the most southern tip of Texas, into Matamoros, Tamaulipas regularly to visit my grandparents, mis

abuelitos, and my aunts and uncles. The crossings continue; although, the escalating border violence due to the drug wars cautions us from venturing deeper into Mexico as we once did so casually.

I inherited two countries, two cultures, two languages. However, navigating between each has taken me in different directions. For years I tried to hide my Spanish voice, my Mexican blood. In elementary school, a classmate wanted to help me sound “less Mexican.” So I silenced my Spanish tongue as I assimilated to my father’s English. It took my mother’s passing for me to recognize the loss, the loss of her voice and along with it my own. While my first collection of Spanish poems helped me to recover *la primera voz que oí* along with my Spanish tongue, which I had pushed aside, the persona poems allow me to explore with some freedom other voices and themes. It allows as well for the continued exploration of my Spanish through some of these other voices. Hélèn Cixous in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa,” notes that writing gives woman a voice and the “woman must write herself... Woman must put herself into the text” (2039). In this collection, where the voices are all female, the mask sanctions the writer with the creative license to take on another’s voice. Adopting the persona of other women is a form of writing about self. Joy Harjo in her poem “Remember” writes, “Remember the wind. Remember her voice. She knows the origins of this universe. Remember that you are all people and that all people are you.”

Additionally, the poetic device “forces the writer to imagine the ‘other’” (Gailey), and to look at the world through other eyes. By doing so, we also consider our connectedness. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the French Jesuit philosopher, in his teachings about evolution and consciousness states, “In each one of us, through matter, the whole history of the world is in part reflected. And however autonomous our soul, it is indebted to an inheritance worked upon from



all sides” (22). He also notes, “We are one after all, you and I, together we suffer, together exist, and forever will recreate each other” (qtd. in Fox 231). Jose Luis Borges, the Argentinean poet, who was influenced by Robert Browning’s dramatic monologues, shared a similar opinion. “*Yo soy los otros, cualquier hombre es todos los hombres*” (qtd. in Ricardo 25) (“I am the others, any man is all men”), he said. In this collection, the connectedness surfaces through the themes of transition and borders. Other connections surface as well.

Gabriel Linares, who explores the use of “the other” in 40 of Borges’ poems, notes, Borges thought of personality not as something that existed within us, but as something we create and present ourselves almost as someone who wears a mask every day. Borges, he notes, decided to distance himself from self to explore others in his stories and poetry. According to Linares, “La pluralidad de identidades que convergen es uno de los mecanismos por medio de los cuales la identidad se devanece” (25). (“The number of identities that converge is one of the mechanisms by which identity is blurred.”)

As the self becomes blurred, the use of a persona also allows for a game of pretend. Yeats said, “I think all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other life, on re-birth as something not one’s self...” (35). It was fun to imagine myself as a child eager to learn how to bake, or a woman playing bingo who justifies a vice with a willingness to share her winnings with the nuns, or Coco Chanel who lived life according to her own terms and rejected traditional roles expected of women in the early 1900s. I also enjoyed how living in another’s world allows for time travel, and presents the capacity to revive the past and to hear a great grandmother in “Los Arrullos de la Revolución” contemplate her escape during the Mexican Revolution. The personae allow us to bring back the dead and a closer glimpse of their lives.

The works of several poets, including Ai and Ezra Pound, drew my interest to the persona poem. I was first introduced to Ai's work in 2007 in Kay Murphy's poetry workshop. Mawiyah Kai El-Jamah Bomani, in her presentation on the Dramatic Monologue and Persona Poems of Ai, invited us to "spend an hour of your day fantasizing that you are another person. ... to become a shape-shifting poet." The poem "What the Soldiers Give Us," about a young girl in Afghanistan was my first attempt. It has since gone through a number of rewrites.

The idea for this collection developed further during the summer residency in 2009 at the Ezra Pound Center for Literature at Brunnenburg Castle in Dorf Tirol, Italy while studying with John Gery. I liked the safety that speaking through another's voice provided. As a Hispanic, Catholic wife and mother, I continually struggle with self censorship. As Ai noted in her presentation, "Persona is a chance for the poet to travel avenues of the soul once taboo to "their" native natures."

The majority of the poems emerged from a writing procedure I established for a writing workshop led by Bill Lavender the spring 2011 semester. The procedure outlined designated writing times – early mornings, twice a week, and rules for the form and process. The names of women whose stories intrigued me – historical, familial, and religious sisters, were placed in a hushache box. I wanted to explore how different women respond to different situations. I wanted to hear their reactions and their thoughts about particular circumstances. A name was drawn from the box at night before sleep time. Each poem was to include an echo in the form of a line or phrase from the preceding poem. The poems alternated between novenas of mourning, novenas of preparation or anticipation, and novenas of prayer. One set was to be written as prose poems, and another in Spanish.

Originally the poems were grouped with the corresponding novena category. The semester's collection was titled "En Otras Voces: With or Without Permission." For this collection, the title changed and other poems have been added as the process continued beyond the spring semester. Several persona poems were left out of the collection to allow for future revisions. The voices simply were not ready to emerge and share their story.

The collection explores a variety of female personae and their circumstances. The time line stretches from Biblical time and jumps to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, the majority of the women speak from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Four speak from the grave. In most cases a general audience is implied for each of the I's who speak. A few address a specific but silent audience. In one we hear a wife addressing her husband and in another a bingo player confessing to a *comadre*. The poems presented are arranged to some degree based on each character's state of being. Some women are in transition, getting ready for a journey or already in route, some are reaching out to help others, and some are restrained while other personae live life by their own rules.

You find women on the frontlines, taking a stand for their own independence, and women who stand on the border of crossing into new lives, women who proceed unconcerned with consequences or with the opinions of others. Some women appear powerless by their circumstances, some are blinded by vanity, and some lost to love, one to the point of taking her own life. Some women remain loyal regardless of the outcome. There are a number of the women I admire, and a few who I fear. La Mas Sanguinaria (the most bloodthirsty), for example, offers a glimpse of a female cartel gang member in prayer before her day of killing begins. Despite her disposition as being someone who is feared, she is a woman who lives in fear herself and turns to prayer. Four of the women are based on nuns who help immigrants and the poor.

These women give a bit of insight on how they have distanced the self to focus in a real way on the other. Abdicating the I is not a game for them. I was also drawn to other independent women. Petra Herrera, for example, who pretended to be a man during the Mexican Revolution and led a band of soldiers into battle.

While some of the personae are based on actual people, some are archetypes and remain unnamed – la partera (the midwife), the curandera, the soldadera, the bingo player whom we meet at the end, the child who picks flowers in Columbia, another child in Afghanistan, the cartel gang member in charge of killing, and an immigrant looking for work.

I found that I enjoyed the revision process as much as the original composition of these poems. It allowed me to spend more time with the constructed I as I considered what each woman would say and feel in a particular moment in time. I found myself wanting more time with each. Unfortunately the more time I wanted and felt I needed, the more disheartened I became. Self-doubt about declaring a piece finished presented itself often because I wanted to make sure each “I” had ample opportunity to express her voice. In some instances it was a challenge to create the needed distance to quiet my own voice. I found that when I did, the persona had more say as to how the poem developed.

The revision process transformed some of the personae. Just as people change over time, the poems changed as well. The poem “My Pleas Ignored,” was one of the last revisions. Here Claudia Procula, who goes unnamed in the Bible and in the poem, goes beyond reflecting about how her husband ignored her pleas to keep the Nazarene alive, to sharing her story of repentance. While she could not influence her husband, she learns she can take charge of her own beliefs.

The partera persona in “*Ya Se Acerca la Hora*” also went through a transformation. Originally the poem was titled “*La Partera*” and the midwife approached the anticipated birth of

a new baby with concern. She began her soliloquy with pleas to the saints for guidance and protection. In the final rendering, not only did the title change to “*Ya Se Acerca la Hora*” (the hour draws near), but the partera regained her confidence in the most ancient and natural process of bringing new life into the world. As she comforts and reassures the mother in labor, she reminds us that rules and formal protocols introduce fear and this hinders the natural process.

Her advice served as a reminder to me that we need not fear or force the words. The poems will come. They will arrive in their own time. I realized my own role as both midwife and birth mother to this collection of persona poems. The process came with both labor pains and joys. Some of the words struggled to make their way onto the page, and some continue to wait.

As I organized the poems into a manuscript, it became apparent that a number of the women, whether directly or indirectly, share their advice as we hear their reflections and concerns. In “Hija de la Tierra,” the *currandera* worries about passing on her knowledge and advises us to remain connected to the earth. Henrietta Lack’s, who speaks from the grave, and Camille Claudel, who speaks from an asylum, seem to remind us that sometimes our lives are beyond our control. Yet other women in the collection, Petra Herrera, La Coronela in “En La Vanguardia,” and Coco Chanel in “Please Don’t Tell the Nuns,” empower us by their examples of independence.

Massimo Bacigalupo, who writes about Pound in “Introduction: Personae vs. the Personal,” points out, “The characters Pound evokes are means of expressing his attitudes” (26). I found this to be true as the themes, which surface in this manuscript, hint to my own attitudes. I found that employing persona as a poetic technique facilitates the conversation about the issues I wrestle with. The subject of immigration, migration, and borders appear as recurring themes. A

consciousness about the suffering in the world also emerges in the voices as the poems address social concerns, those of the poor and marginalized. Other themes include aging and transitions.

The use of the persona as a tool for exploration and expression without fear indeed provides endless opportunities for the poet. While I struggled with some voices and found it challenging to distance myself from the I, I enjoyed the journey of walking as another. However, no matter the distance from the I of the poem and the self, the poet can't help but intertwine her own voice. While the poet abdicates the personal I to explore other I's, the choices of the females selected and the moment in time in which we find them may speak to the personal, as do the themes which surface. We also hear the personal in the language used and sometimes even by what goes unsaid. The use of two languages – Spanish and English, stems from my bilingualism and biculturalism. A few of the personae employ code switching mixing the English and Spanish, sometimes in the same sentences. It is inevitable that the shape-shifting which occurs to allow *las otras* to speak does so with the DNA of the poet mixed in with each I. Thus the exploration of others is also an exploration of self.

## **¿Cómo que Anónimas y Olvidadas?**

La tierra graba cada nombre,  
recuerda cada paso, cada suspiro,  
cada gota de esfuerzo.

Espero que alguien despierte  
las historias, que alguien les dé voz.

## **What do you mean anonymous and forgotten?**

The earth records each name,  
remembers each step, each breath,  
each drop from exertion.

Someone must wake  
the stories, give them voice.

## Before Crossing

On the edges of a Mexican moonlight  
I fill on wine, take inventory  
of what I tow, weigh tomorrow in each sip.

Do I cross the currents of the river,  
and if I dare,  
allow ego to sink?

*Entre aguas oscuras*  
what will be left behind?

I get close, close enough to smell the jasmine  
hesitate and step  
back

not ready to surrender the,  
strip self to cross,  
to continue the quest prescribed.  
*Buscando la santidad.*

"To live in poverty and detachment,"  
she, a soon-to-be saint, explained,  
"to renounce my will, my inclinations,  
my whims, and fancies."

A willing slave...a gift for God.

On the edges of a Mexican moonlight,  
I weigh the gilded clutter  
versus the kingdom gained  
by answering with a yes,  
by crossing.



## Corazón Bilingüe

*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 Rio Bravo  
we call the Rio Grande

that connect, divide.

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

*¿Como 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 los lenguajes.*

## Hija de la Tierra

Hay que madrugar, despertar antes que el sol.

Hay que caminar descalza por el suelo,  
la piel sobre la tierra, sentir el equilibrio  
del mundo. Hay que mantener una conexión.

Voy llegando a los ochenta. ¿Quién seguirá  
mis pasos? ¿Quién hereda este don,  
esta responsabilidad que cargo?

Aquí bajo los eucaliptos y entre  
las hierbas, oigo la voz de Dios;  
las plantas siguen compartiendo sus secretos.

En el invierno – té de canela para calentar el cuerpo.  
La uña de gato para la diabetes,  
gastritis, úlceras y tumores.

Escogiendo cada hierva para los remedios  
y las limpias, sólo respondo al llamado, un llamado  
desde la matriz de mi madre. No soy bruja.

Soy curandera, hija de la tierra,  
ayudante del Señor. Los santos, nuestra  
Virgencita, mis guías constantes.

Me regalaron un libro – *Yerbas Curativas*,  
con instrucciones para las distintas  
formas de preparar las plantas.

Bien explica el cocimiento  
del té, infusión, maceración, jarabe,  
tintura, jugo, horchata, todo lo que aprendí de mi abuela.

Pero las páginas del libro no contienen todo.  
Hay que tocar con las manos, sentir  
el latido de la tierra, sentir el latido

de cada ser humano que se nos acerca.  
No hay que ser sordos. Todo lo que necesitamos  
existe en la naturaleza, nos rodea. Dios lo quiso así.

Estas manos viejas, con su carga de la mañana.

## Desert Goddesses

Awakened from our slumber in the sands  
three daughters – Allat, Al-Uzza and Menat.

I an ancient mother, goddess of fertility;  
my temples found in Wadi Rum.  
My sisters - Al-Uzza, Aphrodite's counterpart,  
goddess of the morning star;  
Menat, goddess of fate and time.

Goddesses, three, born in antiquity.  
The winds wake us from our exile,  
carry our stories; the inscriptions  
left on granite mountain walls, ancient prayers.

The crescent moon smiles on our intercessions.  
The daughters of Allah before we were silenced.

How could Allah have daughters and not sons?  
“Three exalted cranes” deleted from the Qur'an,  
suppressed by Mohammad, veiled beneath red sands,

veiled no more as our sisters revive our names,  
claim a birthright to stand as once prescribed.

**En La Vanguardia**  
Un tríptico de voces revolucionarias

*para las campesinas, las amantes, las coronelas y capitanas*

*“¡Órale! Éntrenle y el que tenga miedo que se quede a cocer frijoles.”*  
–Tomás García

I

**Peregrina en tiempo de guerra**

Espera, no sólo coci frijoles.  
También hice tortillas y soy responsable  
de salvar las vidas.

Aquí no hay tiempo para el espejo.  
El colorete, los vestidos de fiestas  
se quedaron en casa,  
abandonados en la espera.  
Remplazados.

Las balas, los disparos fueron  
nuestras serenatas;  
nos despertaban antes que el sol.

Peregrina en tiempo de guerra

con arma, bebé y reboso  
en el campo de las batallas  
sigue la jornada, la inquietud.

Algunas a fuerza,  
algunas por nuestra propia voluntad.

¿Cómo regresar a casa,  
si nada queda?

Mi reboso sangrado  
con el último suspiro de mi esposo.  
Mi cuerpo vive con sed,  
tiene ganas de una noche  
en cama, una noche de paz.

Ni modo, sigue la tarea  
de que todos tengan algo de que comer.

Sigue la peregrinación.

## **II** **La Coronela**

Me cansé de ser hombre.  
En la vanguardia tomamos nuestro  
lugar, decidimos nuestros pasos.

Aquí no hay tiempo para el espejo,  
para las cartas de amor.

Antes de la guerra  
no sabían de nuestro poder.  
Nos querían solo para lo cotidiano,  
como cocineras, enfermeras, amantes,  
solo que lo cotidiano fue la guerra.

Fuimos espías, contrabandistas, combatientes.

Tuve que cambiar mi nombre.  
“Pedro,” me llamaban.  
Villa no permitía que una mujer  
se enfrentara en la vanguardia.  
Pero fui atrevida, muchas fuimos así  
por la justicia, por la venganza, por la patria.

En Torreón conocieron mi valor  
y tomé mi lugar. Dejé de ser hombre;  
dirigí una brigada de mujeres,  
mujeres valientes.

Hombro a hombro, esos pasos  
sin permiso y con permiso  
nos dieron nuevas vidas.

*Petra Herrera*

### III

#### Una Azteca

Cada quien por su lado.

Cuando el corazón manda  
seguimos como ciegas  
a donde nos lleve los latidos.

Aquí no hay tiempo para los sentimientos,  
los sueños, el perfume de gardenias y rosas.

Aquí en tierra seca  
entre el humo del campo,  
los cigarrillos y los disparos,

las fotos en blanco y negro  
que no encuentran la paz  
no toman en cuenta el destino,  
el azul del cielo, la luz que asegura  
que la vida sigue.

¿Qué sabe una niña de 15 años  
del amor, del poder que toma  
sobre cada paso, tropezándose  
en una guerra?

Tropezándose para seguir a un irlandés.

El sudor de su determinación  
me penetra, me bendice con una potencia  
para seguir entre las balas  
en este baile de sobrevivencia.

Aquí, a su lado,  
una prisionera del corazón  
cargando un hijo,  
aquí en la frontera  
antes de cruzar.

*Manuela "Nellie" Oaxaca (Anthony Quinn's Mother)*

## Letter to a Young Traveler

My dear,

Do not rely on what others have seen. Dot-to-dot itineraries of where to go, where to sleep, where to eat, may serve as reference points, but I insist you deviate off course, risk cliché to take the roads less trampled. Write your own guidebooks; take the stage according to our own terms no matter the hour. Explore, explore, I pray, every continent, circle the globe. I got a late start, had to wait my turn, wait for my sons to find their way.

How fortunate you are in your day for the convenience of such varied forms of transportation. How much more could I have seen if carried on such exotic birds? You will have to pack what suits you best; one essential I insist on – a spirit open to possibilities.

Everyone cautioned me not to go, not to visit the Bataks, a cannibal tribe, in what is now Indonesia. Do exercise some caution, for while I braved my time with the Bataks, there came a moment when the men surrounded me, they looked upon me as a meal. My only weapons, words and wit, saved me. “Too old, too tough to taste good,” I told them. I was most relieved to move on as I did not fancy the palms of my hands, the soles of my feet, the flesh of my head or my heart and liver served as delicacies.

I pray your adventures will keep you safe, that your flesh never be served roasted and eaten with salt.

Yours from beyond the continents,  
*Ida Pfeiffer*

## From Here in the Sabaña

I wake surrounded by fields of pink gerberas and roses – red, yellow, white. The yellow ones are my favorite. They render me captive. On a good day I can pick 400 stems. My sister, she's older, she can pick more. On a good day I don't have to go home sick, dizzy from breathing in the potions they spray on the flowers. Mystery mists mixed to give each pick long life.

“Because we have small hands and can work fast,” weeding pruning, cutting, the bus picks us up early morning, leaves us home at dark.

For *Día de las Madres*, Mother's Day, we pack box after box, of yellows, reds, pinks and whites. Box after box, blooms of our earth, I wonder where they go, who opens them, arranges them, what love do they bring from our labor.

From here in the Sabaña de Bogotá, our flowers leave us. Maybe someday I'll see where they go.



## **Que Pase la Canícula**

Como me gustaría un día libre, un día sin quehacer, sin las lágrimas de tantos hijos, nueve niños hambrientos y dos en el cielo. Bajo la sombra de mi casita, el suelo de tierra firme, las tortillas, las que quedan, ya calentitas, esperamos que pase la canícula, la miseria que seca los lagos y no permite que crezca lo que da vida pero que permite el hambre. El maíz llora el oro que nos pertenece. En estos días de hambre, nada florece.

No me conformaré con lo que trae el sol ardiente. Mis niños tienen que comer. Hacemos planes para huir, para buscar las promesas verdes de la frontera. Mientras tanto en esta ola de calor esperamos las noches y les doy de comer mis historias sazonados con las estrellas, con los abrazos de las montañas, con mis palabras de sed y de amor.

*Mama Pepa (Aurelia Ruiz)*

## In Time for the Harvest

*“For wherever you go, I will go...”*  
Ruth 1:16

Instinct, I suppose, bound me to Naomi,  
bound me after Mahlon left me a widow.

So I left what I knew of my life in Moab.  
Hunger and promises of food took us

to Bethlehem, the house of bread. We walked  
mostly uphill. She prayed and talked about

a God I did not know, but trusted. I  
trusted her as well, felt safe. She, like a mother.

Gold waves welcomed us in time for the harvest,  
fed us, redeemed us. We ate from leftovers –

grain and barley I picked in the fields of Boaz.  
We never went hungry because I followed

her instructions by night; made my move on  
the threshing floor. Where we start and where

we end, all a mystery. Can you imagine  
your great grandmother arrived a foreigner

in time for the harvest with Naomi the matchmaker.

*Ruth, King David’s Great Grandmother*

## Saliendo de Viaje

Mi mochila casi lista, en dos semanas más tendré lo suficiente para el viaje, para descubrir lo que me espera fuera de las montañas y los árboles de este paraíso, este paraíso donde arrullo a mi niña bebé, sus manitas acariciando mis cachetes. ¿Cómo me atrevo a dejarla? ¿Cómo viviré sin sus sonrisas? ¿Cómo quedarme cuando el hambre se hace burla del paraíso?

No estoy segura como maniobraré por la selva de Petén, y claro que no le creo a todo lo que me promete el coyote. Pero el padre en la iglesia por el camino nos espera. Siguiendo el río, siguiendo el camino encontraré cómo sobrevivir.

Mamá, te prometo que volveré, prometo regresar a mi niña bebé. Por favor entiende que no me puedo quedar quieta mientras mi bebé llora de hambre, mientras que la sal de sus lágrimas es lo que le da sabor a su día.

Claro que extrañaré los dulces aromas de mi tierra aquí en Alta Verapaz donde lo verde vive constante a pesar de las guerras, los hombres perdidos, el hambre constante.

Mamá, no te preocupes, no pierdas el sueño, cruzaré bien, un amigo me acompañará. Cada semana sale el grupo para el viaje al norte. Me llevaré la sonrisa de mi niña, su foto protegida en una bolsita de plástico, la medalla de la Virgen María, y las oraciones que me dan el valor de irme de aquí.

## Refuge Seekers

*“But blessed are your eyes because they see,  
and your ears, because they hear.”*  
(Matthew 13:16)

I shared my Vicodin yesterday and will  
again today. They left me  
no choice. How could they just drop  
her off at the corner Circle K? Homeland  
Security called me knowing  
I’d take charge. The stitches  
still fresh on her abdomen ripped open  
from the fall into the river as she dared  
cross. No family here for her, or me.

We, a surrogate family, improvise.

Asylum seekers,  
each running to safety  
on the outskirts.  
Each day a new face  
in a country we do not recognize.

We do not communicate  
with words; each tongue tied  
with a story.

We smile, shake our heads yes,  
point, gesture.  
A shower, a bed, the language of refuge.

So this is retirement for a nun  
from the north? The golden years  
of witness, of refuge.

I need courage to continue here,  
to continue as witness, accomplice.

My own pain feels like an imposition  
compared to what they leave behind,  
run from – a mother who sold her daughter  
as a prostitute; a son who saw his village burn;  
a father in search for more than beans.

*Sister Zita Telkam, Sister of Divine Providence*

## En Casa Oscar Romero

Con los refugiados e inmigrantes  
aquí me trajo Dios, a un país donde  
yo también soy una extranjera.

Mientras que los niños juegan  
en los columpios y otros dibujan  
con colores verdes, rojos, azules,

mientras que la ropa cuelga de los mezquites  
como colores volando, y las gallinas  
merodean en el patio de tierra,

siguen los ciegos afuera de la cerca.  
Siguen con miedo de compartir sus abundancias.  
Siguen su protesta contra los que vienen.

Mientras tanto las Hermanas Misioneras  
de Jesús seguimos nuestra labor  
sin protesta y en oración constante.

Vienen desde Nicaragua, El Salvador,  
Guatemala y Honduras. Vienen para  
salvar sus vidas. Llegan aquí, porque aquí

les damos de comer, donde dormir  
y esperanza para seguir el camino.  
Vienen y vienen, cada día más.

*Sister Juliana Garcia, la monja de España/Misionera de Jesus*

## El Camino que Sigue

Sigo por la vida sin preocupación

abandonando lo de ayer,  
abandonando las quejas  
de la piel,  
de la necesidad.

He dejado lo urgente sepultado,  
conforme con lo que queda.

Sin ojos miro mejor.  
Sin piel nada me molesta.  
Los cohetes por las calles  
no me distraen.  
Truenan como susurros de otro tiempo.

No me escondo del sol  
ni de la noche o de la muerte.

Las lágrimas ya no caen  
por un amor perdido,  
un amor ya muerto.

¡No! Esperen. Miento. No siempre es así.  
Quizá es verdad que las arrugas,  
las canas, los kilos de más  
que tanta atención me robaban  
ahora ya me valen madre.

Pero les tengo una confesión.  
Cada que llega la luna llena  
me persiguen los recuerdos  
de los momentos singulares,  
de los besos escondidos  
entre noches sin fin; todas las estrellas  
alineadas con mis deseos.

No importa. Acepto una juventud  
interrumpida, ya enterrada  
relegada al olvido.

Sigo adelante por este nuevo camino,  
no siempre en blanco y negro.

Estoy bien acompañada  
por damas extraordinarias -  
la Guadalupe y la Frida.

Algunos me conocen,  
algunos no  
bajo mi sombrero  
adornado con plumas y flores.

José Guadalupe Posada  
me dio la vida.  
También Diego me apreció  
en su "Sueño de un Domingo en la Alameda."

Mi destino, no siempre mío;  
un adorno para altarcitos,  
una novedad para los gringos.

Sigo por la vida sin preocupación,  
sigo siendo la Catrina,  
la calavera que nunca duerme.

*La Catrina*

## Hincada, La Más Sanguinaria

En mi barrio luchamos  
para vivir.  
En mi barrio nos acercamos al altar  
con nuestras oraciones pidiendo protección.  
Súplicas en velas, luz de esperanza,  
aquí, hincada.

En los días buenos puedo escoger  
la cantidad.  
Espero que hoy todo salga  
como lo planeamos.  
Espero que La Santa Muerte  
escuche nuestras oraciones  
y que la cocaína, mi elixir,  
siga dándome la confianza,  
el poder para agregarle a mi colección  
de cabezas decapitadas.

Santa Muerte no me dejes sola;  
que el filo de mi machete no me falle;  
que la maldita policía no me encuentre;  
que mis compañeros no presenten mi temor,  
que la sangre de la muerte  
no me toque este día.



## No Time for the Submissive

People expect it because I'm a nun.  
They hold an image, a vision of a woman  
silent all day in prayer.

Neither quiet, nor submissive,  
I have no time to bow to their expectation.  
God has no time for too long a pause.

So I take my prayer with me across  
a border on the edges of darkness.  
We must cross each day from Brownsville

into Matamoros while the drug war wages.  
We can't be afraid. We cross hope into people's lives.  
He needs my voice, my hands, my boldness

to share the Good News of his love.  
He, a God who wants us to sing and dance,  
to know the joy of this world.

I cheered loud for our team in high school,  
jumped, kicked and danced in shorter skirts  
at the games. I cheer loud for our Lord now,

louder because the waters grow fierce  
near the river, because too many  
wake deaf to His love, because someone has to.

*Sister Ninfa Garza, Missionary of Jesus*

## The Gospel of Repentance

I try to remember the picnic on the beach  
when we arrived in Caesarea Maritima,  
the figs we tasted, the waves pounding

the song, celebration. As I pick the bitter  
herbs growing along these Gallic mountains,  
wild lettuce, dandelions, and mint for your tea,

I don't even remember my name; and you  
no longer look at me. Deaf to your own  
heart, paralyzed by the madness

bred by a crowd. You swayed beyond  
my caution, washed your hands and walked  
away. So far from what used to be, in exile

these years, blood gloves my hands,  
spatters from nightmares made real.  
I try to find a new name; pray our son

know the anointed one, the Nazarene  
who lived beyond the lashings, thorns,  
and cross, who left the tomb.

After the crucifixion, they wanted you  
Pontius to lie, report the body stolen, to deny  
again the Messiah. I knew then I could not

remain in Judea or Galilee. No longer  
a gentile, let them know me only as your  
wife, one who witnessed the failings.

Ashes, our sacrifices to Rome, to a concert  
of gods, buried in the Easter Vigil fire.  
He is risen! The tomb left empty.

*Claudia Procula (Pontius Pilate's wife/unnamed in the Bible)*

## Shoes for Juliancito, a Backpack for Karlita

My truck bumps along unpaved roads  
on the side where dreams walk on hard dirt  
floors and clothes pound against rocks into clean,  
where children run in and out of homes  
where discarded cardboard is nailed to reinforce  
a wall or to cover a window when it rains.

The smiles these innocents carry fuel each return.  
From my birth country into my adopted land,  
my red Ford pickup loaded with bundles  
in plastic bags, my contraband – used clothing,  
I cross the bridge again, lose count of the crossings

so that they can go to school,  
so that they can learn  
    to write, to multiply  
    the food in their bellies.  
They must have shoes,  
they must have rice, beans, more  
sponsors to cover the cost.

On this side of the river, children must pay  
for toilet paper, for each test, for a drink  
of water at school, while beyond the unpaved road  
discounted margaritas are guzzled by tourists.

*Esta monja* in gray, past retirement,  
I cross for the children of Las Flores.  
I do not curse the wait, the two  
plus hours on some days.  
I use the time to pray.

Their smiles, my reward.  
His promise that I do not cross in vain.

*Sister Maureen Crosby, Daughter of Charity*

**La Tía Hermana**  
*for Luarita*

We're dressed alike in every photo.  
In black and white and color  
we hug like sisters.

Ya no recuerdo esos días  
y nada de nuestras vidas  
parece igual.

Ya no me dejan cruzar  
y el otro lado suena  
sólo como un sueño del pasado.

Mis hermanas por sus caminos  
con sus vidas como gringas;  
qué esperanzas sin este cigarrillo  
de yerba buena, sin estos días perdidos.

Como gemelas, pero no.  
Tú naciste en el otro lado,  
en otra vida.

We were dressed in navy  
shorts and t-shirts, each held a red  
hibiscus just cut from the garden.  
We were seven in that last photo.

Las sonrisas no salieron igual.

*Laurita Trejo*

## The Prophet's Daughter

Along the Red Sea coast, here in Dahab  
the waves splash against the edges of my village,  
the blue waters constant,  
the wind some days insists we stay indoors,  
indoors with our mothers, and their mothers.

On these days the tourists stay in doors as well  
or linger in the restaurants. On these days  
when they are not in a hurry to return  
to the ocean, they buy their souvenirs.

My father, who will watch from a distance  
gives me permission as long as I wear a head scarf,  
as long as I make a sale –  
beaded bracelets and key chains  
my mother made at home

She will not sell them herself,  
venture outside our door to talk to strangers.

With my father in the storm standing  
still, standing firm, I smile at strangers,  
show them my mother's creations,  
entice them to buy more than one,  
negotiate a fair price.

I will not settle for less.  
My mother made these. It's intricate work.

She counts each bead, strings  
together rainbows or an ocean's smile,  
blends silence into mementos  
others will carry beyond her veil.

How can I settle,  
discount her work?

But some days, in order to make a sale,  
as waves crash against the edges of my village,  
I must.

*Fatima, a young girl from Dahab, Egypt*

## What the Soldiers Give Us

We heard the American soldiers  
would be in our village today  
so we journeyed out in the snow.

Risk? We live in risk.  
The freeze – routine.

Barefoot almost  
walking through snow winds  
my sister holds my hand.  
Her hand, warmer than the green  
scarf wrapped around my face.

I try to wiggle my toes,  
to keep them warm,  
to keep them alive  
in these sandals worn  
by each of my sisters.

We see the line, too long.  
Our chances buried like the ground.

At the back of the line,  
huddled in the crowd  
I blink in warmth,  
maybe the only handout  
I'll get today. I'll take it.

Is it the wind, the snow?  
Eyes on me. Why?

The soldier, I don't know his name  
but I remember his face,  
his smile melted ice  
and moved the crowd.

From his hands into mine  
a black pair of new;  
a black pair of shoes,  
black against my only Afghanistan knowing,  
the mountain white, cold, bare.  
I've never known new shoes.

My sister fights off the boys  
who try to take what the soldiers give us  
and leads me back home.

I remember his face.

I remember, too, my father  
looking at my new shoes  
and ordering my brother  
to sell them.

My feet remember the cold.

## My Name is Lai Di

Six million of us share this name,  
christened with what means  
"a son follows quickly,"  
also, "come younger brother."

Panda,  
Ya an,  
Ziao Di.

Expecting a boy;  
second to a boy;  
bring a brother.

My parents are waiting.  
They will try again  
for a male heir,  
someone to carry their name,  
someone to watch over them  
in the afterlife

because they say  
"daughters are like water  
that splashes out of the family  
and cannot be gotten back  
after marriage."

Wait, hope, want.  
I live in now.  
My name is Lai Di.



**La Panadería**  
*for Pilita*

Barely four years old  
I stand behind the counter  
behind the sweet smells  
my father baked each morning  
before light  
the smells that woke me  
to desire.

I wanted to learn the magic  
of the kitchen, of measuring, pouring  
mixing flour, sugar, vanilla  
into *pan dulce* the entire neighborhood  
craved and devoured.

*“Mire papá, yo le puedo ayudar.”*  
He relented, yielded to my insistence  
just as the dough yielded into his forms -  
*cuernitos de azúcar y marranitos*,  
spicy little gingerbread pigs,  
and large *conchas* shaped,  
like shells topped with sugar.

He taught me how to ice cupcakes;  
allowed me to arrange cookies on platters –  
my favorites the *pan de polvo*;  
forbid me to go near the ovens.

Goyito, el panadero,  
I still remember the aromas  
that filled not just our home  
attached to the bakery,  
in our Mexican barrio in Corpus Christi.

I remember the magic  
that belonged to us before  
bread was not enough.

## In Modern Times

We clothe ourselves in garden hues;  
lavender and turquoise shade our faces.  
The shalwar kamees and dupatta  
shields the skin we perfume with jasmine.

We fill our tin-sheet homes  
with the color and scents of Allah's making.  
But when he, my cousin, trampled my garden,  
stained my village of Chamta

my voice fell silent, mute to their ears  
they did not want to hear how he forced  
his skin onto mine, how a man of 40  
cheated a 14-year-old child  
from Bangladesh's sunrises and sunsets.

No shield for sins deemed  
public. They named his sin mine.  
"Adulteress" my new name.  
One hundred lashes I suffered for his crime.

Allah, according to your will,  
they decide, issue their fatwa;  
in the name of justice I fall in your  
garden before the final count.

*Hena Begum*

## Until Vaudeville Returns

Telling fortunes by reading tea leaves,  
just a pastime for a girl with two left  
feet and a voice not for singing.

Vaudeville dying, Mama Rose desperate  
still for fame;  
who knew that grandma's gift for lingerie  
would be my legacy.  
That connection furthest  
from my mind when I first stepped on stage.

“Just drop a shoulder strap and show  
some leg?” she ordered,  
she who promised the manager I had a routine,  
she who promised I knew what to do at 14 on stage  
in front of men, their newspapers in hand  
to shield their ejaculations.

But will that be enough? I was hungry  
then, still am, no matter the money or fame.

What I didn't write in my memoir, what I kept silent  
what I read in the tea leaves maybe

I learned early –  
leave them wanting.

Mama Rose, or Madame Rose as she christened herself,  
taught us to take charge,  
to take the stage according to our own terms  
no matter the hour.

Asylum seekers each of us,  
on stage, off stage I never revealed much or enough.  
I left them all wanting  
so now, even buried, they want more  
of me.

*Gypsy Rose*

## Memory in the Glow of a Candle

“One generation passes, and another generation comes...”

Ecclesiastics 1

My mother’s green eyes, their vigilant watch over her legacies, show no fear of the dark, show no signs of the enemy that left her bedridden before her goodbye. Her youth restored on this altar. Here a great grandmother, rifle in hand, keeps guard, *una soldadera* in my rendering of a *catrina*, her breasts crisscrossed by artillery, whose legend holds mystery in a face I’ve never seen, next to her frail frame daughter in black and white and our *Virgencita Morena* on the side. On this altar we choose our narrative, the memories we keep. Speak not of rape, bruises or burns.

Three generations joined together in the glow of a candle, women whose voices echo beyond the beatings, beyond kidnappings, droughts, famine, cancer. Here an echo fused in new life. The *molcajete*, the *chile piquín*, the game of *lotería*, memory keepers posed next to the red hibiscus flowers, reminders of spiced dishes, laughter, gardens in bloom.

We come to the altar, layout our *ofrendas*, bring history forward, as skeletons, our transience signifiers, dance in the candlelight held by *calaveras*. Our *memento mori*. Our temporal selves not afraid, convinced that “all is vanity and a chase after wind.”

She escaped the confines of a cave, died after giving birth; she swept a dirt-packed floor, made *coronas* for los *difuntos*; she baked cakes for strangers, cleaned other people’s homes on foreign land; she takes chances across continents, writes about other people’s lives.

## Los Arrullos de la Revolución

*Duérmanse mis niños,  
duérmanseme ya.  
Duérmanse pedazos  
de mi corazón.*

Quizás podrán oír mi voz,  
los arrullos de una mamá perdida.

Todavía les canto,  
los arrullo en la noche,  
en la oscuridad de esta cueva.

Arrullo también a mi bebé  
escondido en mi vientre  
cada noche de guerra.

En la cuna de esta revolución  
¿qué le espera?

Tendré que encontrar  
cómo huir,  
cómo escapar.

Aquí delante de la luz de una vela,  
viuda prisionera,  
busco la fortaleza,  
busco la forma de cómo salir,  
cómo volver a mis hijos,  
a mis padres, a mis hermanos.

¿Cómo darle vida a este bebé  
de la revolución?

*Duérmanse mis niños,  
duérmanseme ya.*

*Paul Ruiz (Great grandmother)*

## Beyond Las Víboras Ranch

They found my words in boxes  
incomplete and waiting,  
handwritten;

tried to exhume my past,  
my stories,  
and with them Mamá Tulita's,  
my paternal grandmother and her tales  
from medieval Spain,  
my sister Tula,  
Tío Patricio, the mystic,  
Tía Chita,  
Tío Camilo,  
Tía Lola, my mother's sister,  
Mamá Ramoncita, our great  
grandmother and her goodbye.

I carried her goodbye,  
her advice, from el rancho to San Antonio,  
to Austin, to Corpus and back.

She reminded me before leaving  
Las Víboras -  
“that land at one time belonged to us.”

“Texas is ours, Texas is our home.”

I owned it in my stories,  
stories written by my hand,  
stories lived by my ancestors  
on our land without borders.

*Jovita Gonzalez*

## Immortal

In the charity ward,  
where I thought I died and left  
five children at home

I lived, continue to live.  
I caught them by surprise.

They never expected this  
from a colored woman,  
a poor tobacco farmer from Virginia.

Not even my family knew.  
I lived beyond 31, beyond  
the knot, the cancer.

They sent me into space,  
used me to make a polio vaccine,  
to clone cells.

They sell me now,  
reproduce me again and again  
and again, adding years to my life.

My cells under scrutiny  
all in the name of science.  
They made me immortal

when they took a piece of me  
rendered me HeLa  
without consent.

*Henrietta Lacks*

**Sculpteur**  
*Un révolte de la nature*

My hands see better than my eyes, speak more  
clearly than my words, connect me to the earth,

help me reach beneath the surface. But without  
freedom, sentenced to oblivion, my hands,

prisoners, mute and blind could not reconnect  
to the poetry, the balance held in the earth.

The clay, the marble, the onyx silenced  
from their stories. In Rodin's shadow,

my own stories broken. New ones remain  
without escape in an asylum, restrained,

where I cannot mold, I cannot carve,  
I cannot shape what needs to be said of this

nightmare. I cannot smooth or polish the stone  
they've imposed here in isolation, find

my way beneath the surface. They censor  
me here, ignore my pleas for new light.

*Camille Claudel*



## La Undécima Musa -“La Reina de la Noche”

Atrevida fui,  
no callada, ni sumisa.  
Niña privilegiada,  
la que mis padres  
no lograron controlar.

El Paseo de la Reforma,  
el paseo de mi mundo por la noche.  
Desnuda por las calles  
mis padres me esperan en casa.  
Que sigan esperando.

La noche llega para disfrutarla,  
la noche oscura llega inesperada.

“Todo el dolor del mundo lo he probado”.

La belleza de mi juventud  
me rechazó,  
me abandonó  
de una noche a otra  
y no desperté igual.

La cubeta de agua  
la miro en mis pesadillas  
que me dejan con sed.  
Ahí hundió mi vida,  
ahí perdí la luz  
que yo sola abandoné.

Mis ojos, mis ojos  
lo que han visto,  
lo que han vivido,  
lo que miran hoy,  
mis ojos como los de mi muñeca Conchis  
ojos siempre abiertos.

*Guadalupe (Pita) Amor*

## **Please Don't Tell the Nuns**

With a needle and thread I mended  
my clothes. They taught me well, the nuns.  
They taught me how to stitch my life into  
new, instilled my fashion sense, my passion  
for black and white, for comfort.

I left the convent to fend for myself.  
The needle and thread always with me.  
I stitched my story from song into sales.  
It did not take me long to learn how to baste  
together enough smiles to please my “investors”.

But please don't tell the nuns.

They inspired my freedom, my desire  
to live without constrictions, to breathe  
life outside the corsets designed to keep me straight  
with whalebones laced at my sides.

But please don't tell the nuns.

In Aubuzine perhaps I contemplated  
marriage, a picture-perfect wife. But beyond  
the convent, beyond the confines of men's ordered lives,  
not all wives wear pearls or get to stitch their lives.

But please don't tell the nuns.

They might think me lonely here unmarried;  
shocked if they knew that one man was not enough.  
I don't think they would understand; they too  
might think me a spy. While everyone was fleeing France,  
I remained, lived at the Ritz during the occupation.

But please don't tell the nuns  
the child they raised, she used the skills  
they taught her, she used them to live  
without constraints.

*Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel*

## Off the Canvas

In each brush stroke he rendered me his,  
he rendered me captive  
on the canvas and in each  
day that followed.

In his studio on Rue de la Grande Chaumiere  
I sat in a corner silent, his.  
He sketched my want, my eyes  
focused on his.  
Not just a muse  
sometimes on the edges.

I rendered him mine, my Modi  
on the canvas and in each  
day that followed.  
I rendered him mine  
as I walked past the window  
followed him into black off the canvas  
into night no color could render  
with life.

Took one daughter with me,  
left another to tend to my story.

*Jeanne Hébuterne*

## Vermillion Marked

My dearest daughter, rejoice in each new day. I pray that the vermillion mark will remind you to stay focused, to stay by your husband's side, our lost jewel.

Bapu insists on continuing his lessons. What a silly man, trying to teach an old woman like me. What I learned years ago, what he has already taught me, serves me enough.

I, who began as a child in a game of husband and wife, resisted, resisted the blending into him. Too much credit, talk, fiction told of my blending now. Indeed, I am at his side always. Indeed I serve him as wife. We wives make accommodations, humor husband's ideas, inklings. My jewels sold, all except my bangles. My passion transferred, redirected by his vow, his embrace of brahmacharya. From wife, to friend, to companion, I, a resurrected Sita, the ideal wife.

Rejoice, daughter, in this new age. Even at the side of a husband, we can practice our own resistance; we can raise our voice. In black and white and color let him take credit in the moment. Let history tell your story. Like the yarn we spin on the charkha, the cloth we make from the yarn, spin your days, your stories. Turn your bows into protest, into more. We are mother and daughter, we are sisters, we are voice.

Blessings this day,  
your loving Ba.

*Kastürba Gandhi*

## Ya Se Acerca La Hora

En medio de los truenos y relámpagos,  
en medio de los ladridos de la noche,  
oigo su canción.

Cada pétalo se sincroniza con el latido.  
La flor se va abriendo para dar a luz.

Calma, calma. Primero un tecito  
de poleo, manzanilla y yerbabuena.

Aunque pasen los años  
no lo puedo creer,  
tantos niños que tengo – 20,000  
estrellas que iluminan el cielo;

Yo una niña de 13 años  
una aprendiz de mi abuela,  
y hoy a los ochenta y seis  
llega otra estrella.

Milagro tras milagro cada parto.  
Sigo en un llamado ancestral  
como Sifra y Púa, parteras nombradas  
en la Biblia, y como ellas miles más.

Ya se acerca la hora. Escucha,  
oigo su canción; te la dedica a ti.

*Voy llegando,  
voy llegando,  
voy llegando Mamá.*

El latido de nueva vida, una gota más  
para el río. Fluye con esperanza  
el sabor de agua dulce antes  
que se acerque al mar.

Cariño, despacio y con cuidado. No te espantes con los relámpagos, las contracciones. La vida toma su tiempo.

Hoy en día nos hacen olvidar nuestra herencia. Nos exigen que abandonemos nuestras costumbres. Los nuevos protocolos y entrenamientos desaniman el uso de las hierbas, dictan las posturas. Acostadas de espaldas, las piernas abiertas, los pies en estribos. Qué conveniente para los hombres; las madres pasan por una línea de montaje.

No olvides que contiene la sabiduría interna de mujer. El cuerpo es sabio. No permitas que entre lo tóxico. El miedo es la base del dolor.

La luz baja, la casa en calma. En este ambiente, mi oficio mimando a la madre, diagnosticando la flor y el desarrollo de nueva vida.

Calma, calma. El dolor va pasando. A veces se esperan para la madrugada. Los milagritos necesitan hacer su esfuerzo para nacer, para tomar su lugar en el mundo. Cada uno con su propio ritmo. La flor sigue abriendo.

Ya se acerca la hora.

## Conquistada y Juzgada

Between the conqueror and the conquered,  
*Madre de los mestizos.*

At my captor's side *fui*  
*su lengua oficial,*  
his translator, his mistress,  
*su amante traductora.*

*¿Qué es lo que esperaban?*  
What did you expect?  
I did what I had to  
to stay alive.

*Hice lo necesario para vivir.*

His prisoner,  
*su prisionera.*  
Hernán Cortez seduced me,  
used me and then abandoned me.

*Ustedes saben la historia.*  
*Me sedujo, me usó, me abandonó.*

You accuse me of betraying  
my people,  
*me llaman traicionera.*

*Recuerden, que mi propia madre*  
*me vendió como esclava.*  
My own mother sold me as a slave.

*Me confunden con la llorona,*  
*porque lloro por mi gente*  
*mi México conquistado.*

*Con mi lengua sobreviví.*  
I survived because of my tongue.

Mastering their language  
I gave him a son, I gave him our people.

*Abandonada,*  
*juzgada,*

*soy Malinali, Doña Marina, La Malinche,  
una india conquistada.  
Hice lo necesario para vivir.*

Was it love, was it ignorance, was it survival?  
*¿Por qué lo hice?*

*Hasta que vivan lo que viví  
dejen de juzgar y váyanse a la chingada.*

*La Malinche*



## At the Triple City Bingo

The caller announces  
B20 I16 O10 G2.

Estoy segura que voy a ganar.  
La comadre me acompaña  
con su buena suerte.

Off of Expressway 83 in San Juan,  
aquí en el Valle vengo a jugar.

Pero no les digan a las monjas  
que busco la suerte en la estatua de Buda  
que compró la comadre en Monterrey.

No les digan que antes de persignarme  
y de marcar cada número le toco la pancita  
para que me dé su buena suerte.

No creo que se me enojen  
porque si gano les daré la mitad.

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## **Vita**

Brenda Nettles Riojas grew up in Brownsville, Texas on the border of South Texas and Mexico. Her first collection of poems – “La Primera Voz Que Oí” was published in Guadalajara, Mexico in 2009. She co-edited "Writing to Be Heard / Escúchame: Voices From the Chicho" with Alan Oak, which was released by Otras Voces Publishing in June 2011.

Brenda is the host of Corazón Bilingüe, a weekly radio program that addresses the dynamics of language and culture and how it impacts writing.