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# No One Over Your Bones

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NO ONE OVER YOUR BONES

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Dean of the Graduate School

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May 2009

## **Dedication**

Para mi familia, both living and passed; I will sing over your bones.

NO ONE OVER YOUR BONES

by

VERÓNICA E. GUAJARDO

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

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Department of Creative Writing

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

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Café Pontalba

March, 2009

New Orleans, LA.

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**An Introduction: I Too, Want to Write an American Poem**



## On the Personal as the Political and Writing an Ars Poetica

*The purpose of poetry is to remind us  
how difficult it is to remain just one person,  
for our house is open, there are no keys in the doors,  
and invisible guests come in and out at will.*

*What I'm saying here is not, I agree, poetry,  
as poems should be written rarely and reluctantly,  
under unbearable duress and only with the hope  
that good spirits, not evil ones, choose us for their instrument.*

*-Czeslaw Milosz*

Politics in poetry is considered a ‘slippery slope,’ a difficult angle to scale, and to do so with success points to a steeper incline. Many have asked, is there room for politics in poetry? Yet many poets have climbed the slope and have been successful, most notably Federico García Lorca, Langston Hughes, and Philip Levine, and other writers who by choice or inclination, seem intrinsically political, such as Julianna Spahr, José Antonio Burciaga and Li-Young Lee. I had to consider this slope when revising my poems and reflecting on my aesthetic and themes. The themes in this collection include immigration, language, memories, and violence. I considered choosing to write poems that did not have these themes, that were perhaps a bit more blissful, more ‘mainstream.’ Yet, as in Czeslaw Milosz’s poem, I did not ultimately “choose” what I wrote, instead, lines and images came to me in the most unusual places, at bizarre times, and as I wrote those ideas down, the poems seemed to form, lines flowed. I knew enough to allow this “organic” process to happen and then go back and dig out the poem, like a bone encrusted in matter.

But the question remained: did I want to write a collection that was clearly political? As often has been said, the personal is the political and the political, being personal, may then translate into

one's work. In her essay "The Personal is Political," Carol Hanisch defends consciousness-raising against the charge that it is "therapy." Hanisch states, "one of the first things we discover in these groups is that personal problems are political problems. There are no personal solutions at this time"(204-205). Sociologists C. Wright Mills also posits that there is very little distinction between personal space and public space, and that this distinction is a sociological construct of "control," which feminist ideology then translates to power or control over womyn and their engendered "roles." A follow up question then becomes: do poets have relevance to current events and times? In the words of Hölderlin "what is the use of poets in a bereft time," and as literary theorist Galvin bluntly asks, why is it that in this country poetry is viewed as separate from the business of the nation ([www.poets.org](http://www.poets.org))? Galvin contextualizes poets in history and how the personal is the political, from Neruda to Lorca, to black nationalists and "radicals" like Amiri Baraka. I would add other contemporary poets and their collections like saul williams' *said the shotgun to the head.*, Tim Z. Hernández' *Skin Tax*, and Juan Felipe Herrera's *187 Reasons Why Mexicanos Cannot Cross the Border*. Li-Young Lee writes, "It's impossible for poetry not to be political," and Galway Kinnell writes "It's poetry's duty and part of its role to speak out." Finally, Sam Hamill, in an open letter dated June 29, 2004, writes "Being a citizen of the world is political."

Curiously, Galvin proposes that "conversation elevates society and creates conditions conducive for democracy. Poetry can fuel this democratic deliberation by transforming the individual and the community"- a statement that caught my attention because of its bold claim. When asked if poetry and poets are relevant to our times, I often ask the same of fiction writers: Does their work "create conditions conducive for democracy" and contribute to the "transform[ation of the] individual in the community"? But is the search for "democracy" even the *goal*? The implication seems to be that if poetry is to be political, it must be subtle, not overt or angry

in order to be effective, acceptable, palatable, publishable, able to effect that “transformation.” This seems to be a great burden for “political” poets, yet in some way a form of freedom.

I find myself struggling to write this ars poetica, this introduction to my work because I understand the balance of explaining my influences, ideas, thoughts, about developing the academic girth as a foreground, while not wanting to over-explain my work. I feel that burden in my political poetry that is both liberating and heavy. I realize that this ars poetica will meander through many ideas and explanations of my work. I realize that I am not the only one who struggles, and that in fact I must I look to poetry for the answer on burdens and fears, freedom and sovereignty in language.

Ted Hughes, in the introduction to the collected works of Sylvia Plath, explains how Plath herself worried about the quality of her work and often had a difficult time giving titles to her poems and even her book titles, often times changing them at least four times. Hughes further describes Plath as a poet whose “attitude to her verse was artisan-like: if she couldn’t get a table out of the material, she was quite happy to get a chair, or a toy. The end product for her was not so much a successful poem, as something that had temporarily exhausted her integrity.” What this teaches me is that I must be content in knowing that I worked exhaustively on this collection, making what I could of the materials I had, which sometimes gave me a table of violence (“En la cocina), a toy that a child plays with, even while surrounded by death (“Wall #5, Or After Silence”) and if not a chair, a bench where forgotten love suddenly is remembered (“Applications in Neuroplasticity”).

● (uno)

### On Language Adorno and Workshops

*“Defenders of the pure call it corrupted, call it corrupting. Chicano corrupts the integrity of the Spanish language. Chicano corrupts the integrity of the English language. Chicana’s integrity is this: she has no respect for borders. She knows why borders are there.”*

*-Benjamín Alire Sáenz*

I was raised knowing that the mix of two languages, specifically Spanish and English was ‘bad.’ Throughout high school, I tried to keep the two separate at home, and mixed them more freely out in the world. In college, I did the same, until I discovered “Chicano Literature.” Here, the mix was everywhere, natural, powerful, beautiful, sensual, a voice I knew. It was a language that naturally sprouted from my tongue. I would come to learn that although some scorned this mix, it was a legitimate form and I embraced it wholeheartedly. Now in graduate school, some ten years later, in a poetry workshop, I was faced with the fellow student’s commentary that proved to be important and crucial for my own development as a writer: he said the Spanish in my mostly English poem was “not working,” that in fact the Spanish in the poem seemed like “adorno,” that it was unnecessary, that if the poem was mostly in English, why add Spanish, and finally that in fact, all of my poetry suffered from the same ailment: it was laden with Spanish *adornos* that did not work. The work could be strong in English or Spanish. But not both.

My first reaction was to dismiss this comment, since it had not been the first time I’d heard it. As an undergraduate student years before, I’d enrolled in my first fiction workshop. I was the only Spanish speaking woman of color there. After the first assignment, sitting in a circle, I sat and waited for commentary, but was greeted by silence. Finally someone spoke up to say that he had no comment because he did not read Spanish, and furthermore, did not attempt to read it when he saw it contained a “foreign language.” The story had a few lines in Spanish, narrated in first person.

Other comments followed which confirmed that because there was Spanish in the text, most had not read it. Of those that had read it, most were not willing to engage it because they didn't want to "give the wrong feedback." Finally, the professor stepped in and kindly suggested that I add end notes that would translate the Spanish to English so I, as a workshop participant "could benefit from the workshop and receive constructive feedback." I said, "But the context it's placed in makes it clear what is happening, and the ideas are repeated in English by the narrator." She insisted that end notes or a glossary would be helpful. I left the workshop that day very frustrated. I didn't quite know why I felt like crying.

My very good friend, Andrés Montoya, said keep writing, to "bust out loco," and another friend, Chacón, said "fuck em, esa." The workshop ended that quarter with the professor suggesting I consider always including translations for the Spanish because that was standard, that I italicize the Spanish so the reader knows to "switch modes," and finally, to choose "subject matters" that were "less sensational," as many of my stories were about barrio shootings, drive-bys, rape by the police, narco-corridos, homeboys and la vida loca. She suggested that this would bring dimension and depth to my writing. I smiled in the instructor's office, said thank you, and passed the course with high honors. I never took another writing workshop until I arrived at UTEP as a graduate student.

When the comment was made regarding the mixing of English and Spanish, which (to this one student) seemed more like "adorno" than craft, I was reminded of that fiction workshop. As a student of the only Bilingual Creative Writing MFA program in the country, I had to ruminate on the comment and critically analyze both my work and the commentary. I began to analyze the context of the comment, as well as the author of the comment --this time not a white liberal at a rich university, but an educated Latin American at a working class-- border town university. I had to dissect the comment which generalized that *all* my poetry was filled with linguistic adornments.

What was evident were several assumptions, as with poet Brodsky, as cited in Sáenz essay, Brodsky who “assume[d] that an American poet is *necessarily and by definition* working in the Anglo-American tradition”(525), and that in fact the “American” tradition is reminiscent of the “American” canon. Sáenz reflects: “It never occurred to Brodsky that there are many literary and cultural traditions that coexist in America, and not every poet who writes “in English” is necessarily enamored of the Anglo-American tradition [...] suggest[ing] I set aside my culture, my working-class roots, and my bilingual heritage if I wish to be an American poet”(525). As I read this, I saw more clearly that there were many assumptions about my work, about the tradition that I come from, about the work produced, the context in which my work developed and certainly an assumption about language.

Language ornaments and aesthetic embellishment in my work will spur valid criticism: not everything I write will be any good. In fact, to quote Daniel Chacón once again, ‘there is no such thing as good writing, only good re-writing.’ Re-writing and revising is perhaps among the most difficult step for writers. This process is laborious and time consuming, and it is in this process that I have pondered whether or not to add translations of my work, add footnotes with translations, a glossary, and whether or not I should italicize the Spanish in my work. It is in this revision process that I wonder if the Spanish should be deleted all together, if I should avoid the headache of literary contests restrictions which usually exclude bilingual work.

However, what unites these two workshop experiences, despite the differences noted and the time span, are not only the assumptions of canon, language and literary tradition, but also certain ideas about language purity. A polyglot aesthetic is not welcomed, or perhaps feared, misunderstood. It is true that I use not *only* Spanish (and a third language, “Anastacio”)in my work but also slang, Caló, “code switching,” and phonetic spelling. It is true that I write from experience and attempt to



capture voices in their primary essence, and this includes testifying (as much as possible) in their original voice, whatever language that may be.

Perhaps to be a marginalized writer means to endure the pressure of the margin when it pushes on you. I understand that “defenders of the pure [language] call it corrupted, call it corrupting,” this mixing of languages. But is it corrupt if it is one’s life circumstance? My experience as a bilingual female, eldest child of migrant farm workers, seasonal cannery workers and hopeful musicians, raised among the harvest of California’s famous “fruit basket,” the Central Valley, fostered in me a sense of language that was diverse, rich and honest. Despite my mother’s best intentions and scorn for mixing two languages, my Spanish was not pure then, nor now. My Spanish came from barely literate parents, a mother who taught herself to read by reading the Bible and a father that could hardly sign his name. I spoke their Spanish. And I learned English in school, among other kids and adults whose words sounded like whispers underwater. As with Sáenz, “English was the language of my education; it was the language of power- of empowerment- of intelligence.” To speak Spanish was to speak home. To speak English was to speak business, to speak to gringos and corrupt landlords and food pantry volunteers. I had to be the voice of my home to the outside world. I read letters in English and told my mother what they said, even if I didn’t understand what I was translating. I spoke for my mother to those behind counters, glass, and desks. I spoke in English and thought in Spanish.

Now, at a crucial junction in my work as a poet, I want to write without margins, without regret, with or without the guise of “corrupting language.” I can never be a linguistic purist, nor can I avoid the polytonality of the poetic line. To write in “America,” meaning the US, means to write with the benefit (or burden) of my experience in America, to write with honesty and to write outside the margin, to “have no respect for borders [because I] know why the borders are there.” I know that my Spanish is more than adornment. I want to write all that is part of my experience here in the

US, in “America,” in a place of many voices and cultures and joys, fears, rights and abuses. I want to write *now*, in a time of war and color coded terrorist alerts. I want to write as a *mujer*, a poet. I want to write in the language that is from the corner store, schoolyard chatter and kitchen chismes. This is my language, I want to write an American poem.

● ● (*dos*)

### On The Use of Poets, Influences and Self

*“wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?”*  
*(what is the use of poets in a bereft time?)*

-Hölderlin from “Bread and Wine”

I’ve had to contemplate whether poetry influences society, just as I’ve had to contemplate what poets have influenced my work. Ruminating on the possibilities, I remember, almost as a short, low budget film, the poets I’ve read that flushed the wind from my lungs, the poems whose words seared the eye of my mind, readings I’ve been to that inspired and depressed, slams I’ve lived, and flor y canto events I’ve read at. I’ve had to think of myself first as a writer (a la Whitman?), think of what my influences have been, and my own place in the universe of poetry. I had to consider how I came to the poetic aesthetic that is part of my writer’s DNA. I often refer to myself as a *Mechikana*, a Mexican *Chicana* because I was smuggled under the barbed-wired skirt of the Tijuana border, spent long Central Valley summers picking cherries, peaches and anything else where the growers looked away because they were more concerned with their harvest than with federal child labor laws. *Chicana* because I dwell in the aesthetic of the marginalized, because Guadalajara and Ensenada crossed their arms, looked away and uttered “*pocha*,” because I toil(ed) for educational chorizo to

feed myself from monolingual to bilingual, to barely literate schooling in the barrios of California's small town schools. Yet I am Mechikana because I am split between two nations, with little loyalty to either, neither, more, but have love and compassion for their best views of themselves. Furthermore, my tongue is split, often times hissing the articulate r's and double l's of la lengua castellana, while other times writing long essays that address whether poets are influential this day in age.

Where do I stand as a poet, given all these parenthetical clauses? Who are my influences and what is my relationship to the literary traditions and schools of letters that I choose to work in now, despite its canonical stance and inclination for what Sáenz refers to as "a penchant for poets who refer to other poets, writers and philosophers" that are already part of the academy? Although I have read many of the poets of the canon, I encountered most of these poets as a conscious adult, that is, as an adult that knew she liked poetry and was interested in the craft of language, and even later, as an adult that wanted to write poetry, perhaps make a living from words. However, none of these poets influenced me at the beginning of my poetic journey. The poets that I read first and was most influenced by were writers such as José Montoya, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Alurista, Juan Felipe Herrera, Andrés Montoya, Gloria Anzaldúa, José Antonio Burciaga, M.C. Mares, Lorna D. Cervantes, Francisco X. Alarcón, Roque Dalton, Joy Harjo, and Pat Mora. These were the poets that we photocopied and passed around like a cigarette or joint. The smudge marks and crinkled corners testified to our mind's expansion, and dirty hands.

Perhaps these poets were the staple of Raza community college students who worked, received financial aid, often times receiving a couple thousand dollars for school per semesters, the most they've ever had, and often spending it on everything else except school (I knew a friend who bought her family a car with her remaining financial aid money). These writers were what other Chicanos were reading. These readers were my friends, yet they were also organizers, activists, pot

heads, single moms, young community college instructors, dreamer poets and writers, and wanna-be thespians, musicians and painters. I heard the poetry of Montoya and Cervantes (not THE Cervantes) and thought it amazing, a reflection of me, a voice I understood. For the first time in my entire life, I read something that spoke to me, of me, for me. This poetry spoke about my life, fears, corner junkies and unwanted babies, of pathetic dreams that were my dreams nonetheless. It was poetry about El Louie, a Pachuco from El Burque, a Korean War vet that returned a hero to defend America, but was unloved by her. He saw signs that said “No Dogs or Mexicans Allowed.” This poetry pass-around had spirits in each line and scents, colors, corazón.

Still, I didn't really think it was “poetry” with a big P, because I thought poetry was rhymed, was about abstract stuff and was difficult to understand because that is what poetry was-- inaccessible and hard to understand. Everything I had ever read in high school, the only exposure I had literature and poetry, what I thought was “real” poetry, had these traits. Always, it was difficult to understand.

Yet this poetry was different, and once I began to like this thing called poetry, I wanted more and more. I asked around, searched the card catalog, rummaged through Norton anthologies and books sometimes left in boxes with a FREE sign in the halls of the English department. What I found were other poets like Gabriela Mistral, Borges, ee cummings, Neruda, Whitman, and Dickinson, Adrienne Rich, Gwendolyn Brooks, even Robert Frost. Then like the high of a joint, smooth, nice, mellow, I wanted even more, and I kept searching until I found more in poets like saul williams, Sherman Alexie, Langston Hughes, Sharon Olds, Allen Ginsburg, Bukowski, and Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz. Then, the importance of music, as it had always been in my life, surfaced in poetry and the “spoken word” and “performance poetry”. I was amazed. The poetry that gave me a buzz on the page was suddenly alive and off the page, enjoyed by many in a communal format, where poets and their works were either hated, booed, poets that were inspired or fostered rage. So, The

Last Poets, The Lost Poets, Gil Scott Heron, Tupac Shakur, Los Delicados, The Taco Shop Poets, and Slam competitions became an important part of my poetic development.

I remember the time I first wrote what I thought was a poem. I was nervous, afraid of it, covered it from roaming eyes like a match near a fan. I did not dare call it a “poem,” yet it was exhilarating and frightening. I did not speak powerfully as the poetry I had read. The words didn’t breathe life. Still, I kept writing when I could, in the margins of history notes, the back of psychology handouts, and below bell curves of statistics. I wrote during breaks at work, on napkins and even paper bags. I finally designated a spiral notepad as my journal, never allowing anyone to see me write in it. In fact, no one would know it as my journal because it looked like a class notebook. I wrote and the more I wrote, the more I wanted to write.

Then, once at an open mic poetry event of a local café, I read from these scribbles I still doubted were poetry. I read my ‘work’ out loud, in public, steel mesh screen rounded the top of the microphone up to my lips. I heard myself breathing. Then words followed, lines streaming, then laughs, smiles, nods, fists in the air from the hecklers in the back yelling “Chicana Power!” Before I knew it, I exhaled and was done; I had read two poems. Years later, as I psyched myself for Poetry Slams, tabbed the poems to be read for a Palabra Lucha Libre, or focused, became “centered,” tuned my guitar to play and to read at an In Xochtil In Cuicatl, a Flor y Canto event with the likes of the same poets I read (José Montoya, Juan Felipe Herrera, Francisco X. Alarcón, The Last Poets), the nervousness was always present, but my relationship to la palabra was different, and the energy of a crowd, the ‘mood’ of the event, my mood, the moon’s cycle, my time limit, the theme/purpose of the event, all those elements had an effect on the energy exerted and reciprocated. And once again, I was hooked.

As Waldman writes, “A poem is a kind of textured energy... the poems I conceive of for performance seem to manifest psychological states of mind. They come together in a mental, verbal,

physical, and emotional form- making their particular event an occasion...”, thus manifesting the energy from a “text [that] has power, and animation... the poem is the experience.” And so, where do I stand now, having had this exposure, as a poet in graduate school loving the experience of Borges, Creeley, Williams, Huidobro, Vallejo, Erdrich, Eliot, Stein, Storni, Briante, many more to come? It is true, as Sáenz concluded in his fundamental essay, “I Want to Write and American Poem: On Being a Chicano Poet in Post-Columbian America,” that “I too may not always know what I am, but I know what I am not: I am not an Ovid; I am not Alexander Pope; I am not T.S. Eliot. I am not Emily Dickenson [...] I do not feel myself to be the true heir of Walt Whitman, to William Carlos Williams...”.

And yet, I know that I am influenced by these poets, that I study their craft buried in line breaks, the assonance that flirts with music and I am awed at their poetic eye’s ability to see what I have seen a thousand times, yet see it anew. I am a Mechikana who continues to probe her poetic norms and mores, perhaps resigned to finding comfort in *Nepantla*, a Nahuatl term referring to the place of *in between*, or a reference to the space of *the middle*. Gloria Anzaldúa observes: “to write, to be a writer, I have to trust and believe in myself as a speaker, as a voice for the images [...] when I write it feels like I’m carving bone. It feels like I’m creating my own face, my own heart- a Nahuatl concept. My soul makes it through the creative act.” And discussing the same energy that goes into poetic expression, working with language as “poet-thinkers” (Heidegger), “Sentence Thinkers”(Barthes), “word-workers”(Waldman), and “cultural workers”(Baraka), I position myself as a worker as well.

I am a working poet trying to decipher her Mechikana-ness, bilingual-ness and poeta- ness. I am a reflection of ‘America’s’ NAFTA agreement, of *You Tube*, text messaging, Enron, of a Homeland Security color coded security system, of hybrids, overpriced organic produce section, bank bail-outs and the “morning-after” pill. I am an extrusive igneous poet, sometimes pure of heart

and intention, and at times a conglomerate composite poet, especially when I remember that I love Vicente Fernandez and Lola Beltrán's voice as much as I loved LL Cool J., Madonna and Lisa Lisa and Cult Jam, Michael Jackson's *Thriller* and Mahaila Jackson's gospel, that I danced to Soul Train and Siempre en Domingo con Raul Velasco, that I loved when mom made hot dogs in flour tortillas with beans, ketchup and mustard.

If the importance of poets and their relevance to modern times is simply that they leave me with craft and lines to study, with polyglot images and languid answers to solving the world's riddles, then I am satisfied. Yet I suspect there is much more. I will continue seeking my place, even if it is clear that I may be considered other or an "ethnic" poet or worse, a poet who is perpetually in between lenguas, fronteras, comidas, música, política y estéticas. I am a Nepantla Poet.

●●● (*tres*)

### **On Language as Identity and Poetic Forms**

*"Williams requires that the artist see absolutely into things so that the insight becomes the thing itself... He finds his contemporaries among painters because his poetry was becoming a way of seeing as well as writing"(86).*

*-Webster Schott*

I know William Carlos Williams wouldn't consider himself a Chicano, a literary vato loco with left-wing tendencies and secret desires to raise Aztlán from its slumber. I don't think all Chicano poets fit this description either. However, for his time, Williams was indeed a radical, proclaiming that poetry must reflect the commonality of life and beyond that, that poetry went "hand in hand with life... that lead us forward to new discoveries," that images were in fact where the imagination could grow and find meaning. This was clearly exemplified in his poem commonly

referred to as “The rose is obsolete,” a poem imbedded in *Spring and All*, an innovative hybrid collection of prose and poetry. The poems’ first stanza reads:

The rose is obsolete  
but each petal ends in  
an edge, the double facet  
cementing the grooved  
columns of air--The edge  
cuts without cutting  
meets--nothing--renews  
itself in metal or porcelain--

whither? It ends--

The reference to Gertrude Stein’s idea of a rose and its metaphorical possibilities and representations is what Williams is chipping away at in this poem, providing us an almost mundane description of the rose, a description that in the end, clearly continues to have room for metaphorical possibilities and representations. Only Williams does this through concrete images and precise language:

The fragility of the flower  
unbruised  
penetrates space.

Webster Schott, in his introduction to *Imaginations* (where *Spring and All* comes from), states that “Williams requires that the artist see absolutely into things so that the insight becomes the thing itself.” Schott asserts that “his poetry was becoming a way of seeing as well as writing.” This fundamental idea of using poetry as a way of seeing is crucial to all poets. Williams himself asked “To whom am I addressed?” Williams, like me, asks for whom do we write poetry? For Williams however, the answer was much simpler: “To the imagination.” He worked many years laboring to come to this conclusion: write to the “imagination” and the limitless possibilities of language and



poetry. It is not so obvious for me. But perhaps what is clear is that Williams' use of language, identity and poetic forms are a venue to addressing my questions. So, all I can do is work, be a word worker, poetically labor and explore so that I too can "see absolutely into things so that the *insight* becomes the thing itself."

Williams' body of work reflects the need to find a new American form and poetic aesthetic. "His poetry was becoming a way of seeing as well as writing," and in doing so (I argue he succeeded in accomplishing this), he influenced poets of the next generations. *I Wanted to Write a Poem* influenced Sáenz's essay, published over 20 years later. Williams influence on Chicano poets and poets in general becomes important because for many poets, poetry *is* a way of looking at the world, one that searches and explores. If poetry is to look like the place that it comes from, then America as a source is ripe for la pisca, the picking.

I think of Chicana poet and activist Gloria Anzaldúa. As I read *Spring and All*, I see how the blend of poetry and prose mirrors Anzaldúa's master work *Borderlands- La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Beyond the red wheel barrow, I see images, lines and linguistic sharpness that digs upward for survival, that "feels like...carving bone." Anzaldúa too, is working through the form and language in her poetry, which becomes her way of "seeing" her identity, her "homeland" America, her language, her past and future, a way to express her "Nepantla" status, her view of herself as an American poet who is a Chicana.

Yet I wonder how I can look to Anzaldúa or Williams to understand how I am to write an American poem. What does it mean to write an American poem? What does it look like, read like? What is it about? Who is it about? What language is it in? And perhaps more importantly, for whom is the American poem for? The work of Anzaldúa alone leads one to ponder the connection between language as identity and how poetic forms sprout content, and vice versa.

All *Borderlands*, in fact, may be used as a learning tool and model that may lead me to understand how I may write a American poem. However, I look close to the clues that lie in Chapter 5 titled “How to Tame a Wild Tongue.” Anzaldúa begins with a statement that asks,

what recourse is left to them (Chicanos) but to create their own language? A language which they can connect to either identity to, one capable of communicating their realities and values true to themselves- a language with terms that are neither *español ni inglés* [authors italics], but both.

So, does the American poem have its own language, a language from its “melting pot” such as English, Navajo, Spanish, and all its derivatives? English itself has so many derivatives and the idea of a “standard English” in America seems to continuously become undone. This too can be said of Spanish in America. Anzaldúa explores this idea when she lists “some of the languages we (Chicanos) speak:

1. Standard English
2. Working class and slang English
3. Standard Spanish
4. Standard Mexican Spanish
5. North Mexican Spanish dialect
6. Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California have regional variations)
7. Tex-Mex
8. Pachuco (called Caló)” (55)

A poignant question might be, however, who are these “Chicanos” and what right do they have to create a language that is related to their identity, that is “capable of communicating their realities and values true to themselves,” and why must it be a language “with terms that are neither *español ni inglés* but both”? Williams himself rarely used more than a sprinkling of Spanish words in his poetry and rarely used local or regional dialect as his norm in tone and timber, although the descriptions in his language reflected the quotidian. He definitely never used much “improper” Spanish or English. He never mixed Spanish with the English (Spanglish). He was not a Chicano poet. But I know he would understand the Chicano the imagination in language usage, wrapped in

identity, wrapped in America. Williams represents the possibilities of American poetry, the results of seeing the American imagination.

The Chicano, as a cultural phenomenon, arguably began in 1848 with the “sale” of a third of Mexico to the Manifest Destiny desires of a young nation. Overnight, Mexican citizens that sought opportunities, land, and distance from an oppressive central government, often preferring to be known not as Mexicanos but as Californianos, Nuevo Mexicanos, ceased to be any of those things and became American citizens. The history is well documented. What might be less known is what Anzaldúa refers to as “linguistic terrorism,” where overnight a bicultural clash began to brew. These annexed citizens became orphans of one, and step-children to another, and language was one of many major factors for such a bicultural clash. They became “*deslenguados* (un-tongue-d)... we are your linguistic nightmare, our linguistic aberration, your linguistic *mestizaje* (miscegenation), the subject of your *burla* (mockery)... Racially, culturally and linguistically *somos huérfanos* (we are orphans)- we speak an orphan tongue.” And so they speak in a variation of one or more of the eight “languages” Anzaldúa lists. And because the baby came with the bath water, they are here, and they speak as they may, as they must, and they even write poetry sometimes. They have become city mayors and teachers and sometimes poets and scholars.

But what is this form, this poetry from a cultural phenomenon, and can it really be American poetry? Is it about the annexation of 1848 (aren't they over that)? It is poetry about the America of today, about Americans and its streets, barrios and ghettos, of Chicanos on those streets and in those barrios and ghettos, and urban enclaves, in suburbs, canneries, and universities. Thus, the American poem looks like the place it came from. It looks like Segundo Barrio, Fresno, the Mission District, Albuquerque, downtown El Chuco, and more and more like the American Bible Belt, like Ohio, Missouri and North Carolina. It looks like the empanadas sold at McDonald's, two for a

dollar jalapeños at Jack in the Box, and the brown workers in those kitchens. It is searching. It is working. It looks American.

And yet I wonder what the poetic forms of the American poem are? More importantly, for whom is the American poem for? In his important essay “Projective Verse,” Charles Olson proclaimed that “projective or open form” in poetry is a spontaneous composition process in which the writer engages speech “at its least careless and least logical,” because here is where one releases to the imagination, to the surrounding, to the place one is at, to the language that is “organic.” Once again Williams and Anzaldúa may provide some clues. In looking at the form of Williams’ *Spring and All*, and Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*, there is no coincidence that Anzaldúa’s poetic form mirrors that of Williams,

the way they both chose to s p a c e  
indent,  
the way they both  
assemble their poetry, infused with prose and  
thoughtful insight on what it means  
to write poetry, to be a poet,  
to create a form that  
seems organic, open, projective, and is  
a form of necessity, of survival,  
of the people, for the people, for the poet’s poem.

Williams, Anzaldúa and Olson provide a model for experimental, eclectic, and unconventional voices of America. They reflect the place that they came from, the America that is explorative and unconventional, and thus is a form that is of necessity, organic. Thus the form is an

extension of content, and by this means, the poet must use every available technique in their pencil box. *La necesidad es la madre de la invención*: necessity is the mother of invention. Form therefore must work and explore, must bend and twist and break to tell the story of a soon-to-be gentrified Segundo Barrio, first love in Compton, and a yuppified Mission District where empanadas sold to gringo are called turn-overs. The form of the American poem must allow for growth, making room for Mexican Indian workers who barely speak Spanish, who are viewed as a “less-than” citizen in their own country, and now must come and be three times “alien.” The poetic form must “absolutely [see] into things so that the insight becomes the thing itself,” so that it can work for those poet-workers who serve, clean, cook, that make chicken chow mien and fried won tons for Asian owners who speak perfect Spanish and pay a flat fee of 25 dollars a day, cash. This form is American because this poetic form is ever changing, experimental, explorative, unconventional: it may stem from the subculture, but is nonetheless part of the American working tapestry. It may vary in language, which may or may not always indicate identity (indio-mexi-migrant-trilingul-asian food cook-in-New Orleans). It may not make sense and it may be eclectic, but this may lead to a different “way of seeing as well as writing.” And herein lies the American Poem.

●●●● (*cuatro*)

### **On Writing an American Poem**

*“American Poetry now belongs to a subculture. No longer part of the mainstream of artistic and intellectual life, it has become the specialized occupation of a relatively small and isolated group. Little of the frenetic activity it generates ever reaches outside that closed group. As a class, poets are not without cultural status. Like priests in a town of agnostics, they still command a certain residual prestige. But as individual artists they are almost invisible.”*

*-Dana Gioia*

As I sit here at my desk overlooking the top of a pine tree outside my window, often staring at how the sun light reflects on the walls of my apartment, I see the thin brown haze over downtown El Chuco and Juárez and think about writing poems. Yet being on the border between one of the richest nations in the world and a “third world” country drives me to wonder how I will write my American poem. I came to this borderland as a graduate student in the only Bilingual MFA Program to write, and after exploring in this *ars poetica*, I am hopeful that I have a good idea about what an American poem is, what it looks like and for whom it’s for. Or do I? Perhaps what is more clear is *why* I must write them.

I say that I know, but I’m not convinced. I say that I want to write an American poem, but I’m still unsure. I wonder if instead it would be easier to avoid political poems. I wonder if there is a difference between an American poem and a political poem; if it is easier to write a feminist poem, one that declares my femininity and matriarchal powers over a masculinist establishment machine. I am left to wonder if indeed I can write an American poem if I am not completely clear myself as to what that poem must look like, or what that poem is about.

And so perhaps, all I can do is begin with an attempt:

**Sin Title (Nepantla?)**

cut words in worn ears  
cracked eyebrows  
above  
rusty eyes,  
tin roots  
bulge on cheeks  
crumble-  
words skid  
off the mouth  
          crack the tongue  
timber on tonsils  
gags whole phrases.

child: the edge of  
an american radio song

is all you get...  
mumble-  
bee coz  
thos wurdz  
mast stei at houm.

Anzaldúa uses the term *Neplanta* to describe herself as a poet and *mujer*: always in between (cultures, languages, sexuality, class, genres, etc). Gioia might refer to this in between as a “subculture,” which is where he believes American poetry currently resides. He also argues that American poetry is “no longer part of the mainstream of artistic and intellectual life,” and that in fact it has “become the specialized occupation of a relatively small and isolated group.” I agree that poetry is work, that it is an occupation that requires time, effort and re-work. I can’t agree or disagree with Gioia’s claim that “as a class, poets are not without cultural status... they still command a certain residual prestige.” And to answer his most basic question as to whether or not poetry matters now, I can only say that it does matter to me now, here, with the view of Juárez, as the thin brown haze over downtown El Chuco that knows no border.

Still, all I can do is begin with an attempt to understand what an American poet may be and look like, if I am to be a part of that canon. I wonder if it is pompous of me to include my own poetry, as if my poem is an example of what an American poem must be, is, could become. All I can do is attempt. In the following, Williams attempted to warn me of the struggles of writing poetry in America:

My heart rouses  
    thinking to bring you news  
    of something  
that concerns you  
    and concerns many men. Look at  
    what passes for the new.

You will not find it there but in  
    despised poems.  
    It is difficult

to get the news from poems  
    yet men die miserably every day  
        for lack  
of what is found there.

The worker poet may not get their news from poems, but instead create poems from the culture and subculture they are from, poems that push against the margin when they look like the place they came from and are read in America (and elsewhere). Williams writes of the hard lessons in these lines from "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," which intends to make clear the hard work that poetry must do, that its relevance may be hard to pinpoint, yet is unmistakable and perhaps more and more *not* invisible.

And still, I am left with doubts, as if the exploration I have written here is incomplete, or even meaningless. I am still in Napanatla as to what my American poems will be about, look like, sound like... *why* write such a thing, even as the haze continues to build over downtown and the winds are starting to whistle.

I make a second attempt:

### **Creative Writing (in College)**

A frequent mistake made by  
inexperienced writers is that they  
use muggings, murder  
big guns in their work  
    you have  
all of these  
in your poems,  
She says, and  
i try to explain  
i did not choose them,  
that those images  
ooze from my eyes  
like the slow drop from an  
elmers glue on it's side,  
que es parte de mi vida  
from me from mí



sin control imágenes que todavía  
me espantan el sueño  
but she says,  
Find a different subject matter,  
perhaps  
something less sensational.

[I don't know how to make  
a good poem out of this]

Why this need to write from memory, experience, the want to write this American poem, and why not learn from the hard lessons that have been summed up for me by other poets: Poetry is hard and can be solitary. I can shut this computer down, open the door, walk downtown, not look up at the haze and shop for made in China plastic bowls, for my embroidered red Mexican dress, or eat green enchiladas with yellow cheese and side of Dim Sum from one of the little restaurants where the Asian owners speak perfect Spanish to their Mexican cooks. Why the need to dredge up these questions? *The haze over Juárez looms...* Perhaps the answer lies in my insecurity as a poet and as an American. I wonder if I am a poet. I wonder how one knows when that title is earned. Is there a time frame? I wonder if I am an American, when that identity will be included in my self appointed labels. The answer is because I am a Chicana, I must therefore be American.

I write: because I must. And yet I see that America, in all these dichotomies and contradictions, this *Nepantla*, is in fact the cornerstone of what an American poem is. I could not write poetry, Chicano poetry or not, as a *Mechikana*, if I was not an American. I am a poet formed by an in between language, a language that has shaped my identity, and even my politics. I can continue to walk downtown pass the shops and over the International Bridge and into Juárez, sit in the Kentucky Bar, and, still, my poem would be American, even if I did not write it in America because I am indelibly marked by her stars, stripes, and huddled masses. I don't want the assumed monolithic Mexican mass, or Latin American's signature magical realism to mesh with my style too

much. I like, I want the uncertainties of the political and ever changing, experimental, eclectic, explorative, unconventional: I want the grit of America. I want to believe Zoe Anglesey, who states that “poetry of engagement and discourse celebrates and confronts, [where] passion cannot be denied or undermined. It might obliterate one readers taste, and facilitate another’s,” yet the “drive and energy each poem seems to say *Made in American.*” This means that it can be corruptive, abrasive, eclectic, and perhaps will always perpetually be in between lenguas, fronteras, comidas, música, política y estéticas. I will be like brown haze over two downtown metropolises, a vanishing river between them, where the dwellers walk back and forth, cautious of the changing winds.

the fragility of the  
penetrating space  
feels bruised  
after carving bone:  
here, in between  
there is  
    life.

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● (*uno*)

*Retablos de un milagro*

**Por el cerro**

*“No veas pa’ ya, mi’ja”*

fumes rise thick, sand piling over the body, under a bleached sun  
crawlers from its bulging gut, erupting through the flannel shirt purple light  
green brown, a ribbed rock caved into the head, black hair strands  
pressed to loose skin in chunks- by the left foot a plastic  
gallon has no lid.

El Coyote yells keep moving shuffled feet crunch dry dirt

*“No veas mi’ja. Cúbrete*

*la nariz... en el nombre del Padre, del Hijo...”*

## Saliendo del túnel ya es San Diego

a zigzagging white search light above, propeller blowing granules  
in the nose, eyes: gusts heavy on wet clothes- it's hard to run even in  
thin fog, the ocean nearby salts the lips

run run run wait

for the others under thick brushwood, eyes slowly see in  
darkness as they huddle

but I don't see her I don't see her I don't

no la veo.... *"mamá...dónde está...no veo a mi mamá..."*

clump down, don't move

*"Pues si no sale, nos vamos. Ni modo, niña..."*

## Corran p'al carro azul

*¡Aquí!* The flashlight's beam brushes inside the trunk. *“Órale, métanse...  
tienen que caber todos!”*

a glimpse of a rusted heavy tool box by plastic bottle, red letters  
moon enough to see where to lay, be still, dark, more than ever  
dark, more, fit more

dark still, cold, metal, gas no air gas fumes gasoildark  
*“¡Respira niña! Cierra los ojos, pero no te duerma...”*

## Music by Ensenada Windows

*sun filters through the lace curtains to form patterns on blankets, a blue speckled cup with water on the dresser for night thirst and the sleepless santos that move through rooms: in my hand the warm light in shapes, then a song beyond the window plays*

*“...Allá, al pie de la montaña, donde temprano  
se oculta el sol...”*

*wake up, go peek, see Tata sing every morning and smoke small cigarettes, peek, before he sees that I see him then smiles, hugs like I've been lost*

*“...quedó mi ranchito triste, y abandonada ya su labor...”  
a sharp jab to the neck  
“No te duermas, niña, ya casi llegamos a Los Ángeles...”*



## La casa segura

a sudden jolt forward with the stop, slowly backing-up, silence: the trunk opens to brilliant light gushing through closed eyes

*“Órale, fuera que ya llegamos... bájensej”*

legs won't straighten, so he grabs my arm towards the doorway; I look back to see a hazed night against tangerine streetlight glow, a house across the street with toys, a toy truck on its side next to a blue plastic pool   click

click click click the metal garage door folds down

click click stop in front of the car *“¿Viste todo eso? Esto es América, niña...*

*órale, vente para acá...”*

## El pasillo hacia el cuarto

*“¿Cómo que se te perdió, güey... y esa niña es la hija?”*

a thin mattress on the floor with tiny yellow flowers, green petals,  
no stems, a bent dark stain in the center, darkened sprinkles orbit over: another mattress  
next to a narrow door opened a black wire hanger is still

*“Pues llévala al otro cuarto”* light pushes  
against a blanket over the window, thick-nails, light stripes on a purple flat  
shoe, toe curled up, dry mud

*“¡Ven, y no te asomes abí, chingado! Ese cuarto no te toca... vente pa'cá...”*

## Sin sueño

murmurs beyond the door of light seeping

*“Pero ¿cómo dejaste a la madre, güey?”*

a thin blanket covers only when I hug my knees, eyes burn  
like my feet, cry for her... swallow each gulp wet salt to lips like that night  
in Tijuana when she said be strong, that we’d have to keep running, do as we  
are told because el coyote was just doing his job

*“Pues al jefe no le va a gustar...”*

then she whispered sleep it would be a long trip, father waited  
over there, but I couldn’t sleep because the light outside was flashing motel red,  
the plastic pillow crunched every time I moved, smells of pee and Tata’s cigarettes

*“a ver si no te mete un tiro*

*en la cabeza, por pendejo...”*

## **Slauson Swap Meet, in L.A.**

chests, plastic hips wearing tight jeans, no arms, heads

*“De nada nos sirve sin la madre...”*

*¡A quién le cobramos el dinero, baboso!”*

from small windows hands serve white paper plates to people that fill  
benches and eat in long rows as black birds and pigeons meander the sky  
land quickly, pecking light crumbs that fall to the ground, shaking  
with the bass from speakers of a stage where four men in tight shirts, large  
belt buckles sing as young men and women dance so close  
so fast they push the crowds back with each turn, twirl tun ta,  
tun ta, tun ta,... *Hay que darle gusto al gusto,*

*la vida, pronto se acaba...*

*“Pues, una de dos güey, amanece en un basurero, o la dejamos ir...”*

## Un milagro

birds flutter with warm winds that sway cages- \$20 especial de pericos

*¿Sabes en qué parte de Los Angeles está tu papá, niña?*

chirp cheep cheep gaaaak cries riswe to the sun high above

like the vapor waves from that fountain where everyone comes to drink

*...no sé señor, no sé, pero no*

*me deje en el basurero, déjeme ir...*

go drink,

get some water, go...

when no one is there, he says

ya por favor, que tengo sed

ve y toma ve ya veyá ya ya no llores

ve... vete

toma del agua

sí toma

donde toman todos

me suelta el brazo

ve pon los labios

y quítale a los

pájaros

ese pedazo

de pan duro.

●● (*dos*)

## Invocación

*agua*

concha hueso del mar  
a mis pies una  
tinaja de metal  
pies en el centro  
agua desenvuelve sobre la cabeza  
burbujas  
cubren caen llenan  
“el baño bajo  
la luna llena es bueno pa'l cuerpo y alma”  
reflejos brillantes  
bajo la luna lustrosa  
primavera obsidiana

*tierra*

curvas de valles, sutil  
sombras empedradas  
planos áridos cual chile seco  
aguarda semilla circular  
aquí, entre surcos rectos  
largos  
“el sol del norte cala más”  
costal de garra arrastra con  
cada peso pesa más  
dedos delgados alivian  
la mata que  
se tambalea bajo la  
carga madura  
del verano dorado

*aire*

enchina la piel  
cada poro sacude un aviso  
al oír el cantar de cenizales  
“tantos que antes tapaban  
el sol- soy viejo pero me acuerdo”  
el carcajeo de la aves  
chachayotes al unísono  
iban y venían sobre ciudades  
cerros, cultivos como

parches de una cobija  
colorida que acurruca el  
otoño en  
blanco frío

*fuego*

flama de la candelilla  
se mece en la repisa  
billetes  
monedas claras y oscuras empiladas  
botón negro  
un reloj Citizen  
tarjeta con números y  
un nombre por detrás  
“ya casi tengo pa’ mandar por ti... este  
coyote no deja a nadie en el cerro”  
zapatos húmedos frente  
al calentón sin gas  
sólo una cobija de *Goodwill*  
la de los parches rojizos  
los colorados secos sus preferidos  
en las cuatro esquinas  
que cubre invierno



## En la cocina

*Esas cosas o su memoria están en los libros  
que custodio en la torre.*

*These writings or the memory of them are in books  
which I guard in the tower.*

*-Jorge Luis Borges, "El guardian de los libros"*

### "FEE NOTICE"

a notice from the Stanislaus County library demanded,  
perhaps about bird migration disruption  
trucha, he liked birds-  
maybe on wood crafts, carpentry,  
he was building a speaker box for when he could get a car-  
or Cliff Notes on the Odyssey and the Iliad  
he read it for Language Arts class where he penciled  
1962 Impalas, a Sagrado Corazón and Aztec queens  
with big chichis and lush Quetzal feathers.

### "DUE: \$56.00"

books borrowed because he had none at home  
no shelves for books except his mother's double  
phone-book size Bible kept behind a wood and glass case  
with the glossy painted clay dishes from Michoacán  
a set of shot glasses with the word "Morelia"  
collection of recuerdos, a pink slipper with lace  
mini champagne glasses, ribbons hot glued  
to a plastic heart-shaped vase  
tiny niños Jesús with a gold stamped lettered  
ribbon around the foot.

### "YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THESE MATERIALS"

but Doña Roberta didn't know, neither did her mother  
una viejita whose right eye was white as if the morning  
Central Valley fog were stuck in there,  
only the sun never melted it away;  
His sister didn't know either.  
She always had large purple hickies  
around her neck and wore her novio's  
clicka colors, those pelones who hung out  
smoking mota, bumping oldies about  
angel babies and smile now, cry later.

“FINAL NOTICE: RETURN INDICATED ITEMS...”

finally Don Manuel said he cleaned the glass case,  
the wall, table, chair but threw the library books away  
because of the splatter  
bone fragments on them like bugs on a bumper.

Big E, Ernesto, that homie, carnal since the fifth grade  
    he secretly liked school, always did good, even got a ribbon once-  
whose brother, cousin, niece were still in la pinta,  
    he wanted to be the first to graduate from high school-  
was studying at the kitchen table,  
    he shared a room and had no desk-- the kitchen table a tower  
    of books stacked around, never high enough to  
    keep out telenovela cries  
    street bass, sirens, just enough to hear his  
    thoughts, solve right triangles and the Iliad,  
when it happened;  
    in through the back bursting through his chest  
        another in the mandible, disjointing the jaw  
        blowing the ear, bits of red and white  
        soaking into each borrowed page.

## El Chuco Chronicles, 9/15/08

*While Sitting at the Food Court inside Target*

Le pregunta que cómo le fue en el date the other day n  
she answers que nomás fueron a su apartment n hung out  
¿ah sí? she responds kinda shocked-  
ya habíamos ido a cenar antes n we have gone out  
a few times now, so it was time to go there, so don't  
be like 'oh my god, okay, Sandra?!'

So Sandra le contesta que she didn say nothing, yet  
she knows what Sandra's thinking because she's the one who  
re-arranges work schedules  
with the manager so she can go  
to church Sundays and Wednesdays; she is her friend  
who finally stopped telling her about accepting the Lord  
as your personal savior --she can't be mad at her.

She sighs... I like him, that for the first time in like a long time  
there are no thoughts of that night, the accident  
like there's a new patch  
growing over it, you know?

But he hasn't called since like Tuesday...  
I don't wanna call him y estar toda desperate for him, right?

Sandra le dice que se aguante cuz he's probably just  
busy with work n stuff, as they get up from the table  
walk to the trash, dunk crumpled wrappers,  
ice cubes falling into cups amid dings at the registers  
sliding glass doors huddling cool air in an integral calculus buzz:  
they walk down a long wide aisle  
that reflects slender lights above,  
to the back of the store, in through swinging gray doors  
that say authorized personnel only.



Ensenada vato de “las colonias”  
who was living la Mexican ‘vida loca,’  
imitating la step child Chicana vida  
    con rolas de oldies, los carruchos  
con rines y bien acá  
para rondar las calles y buscar pleito  
con vatos de otras colonias,  
así como se wacha en las películas estilo jollywud  
con pistolas y putasos  
no longer toe to toe,  
everything ending with  
madrecitas que se quedan crying  
grasping the mound of loose soil around  
el cajón en el Camposanto  
and asking Diosito por qué  
se llevó a su hijo, tán joven  
tán bueno  
tán tierno  
tan tan dice el fin de la canción.

### III

I have no pictures of Martín  
because we visited often and no one  
ever had film for the camera,  
Martín that helped my Tío José  
in the junk yard pulling calipers,  
alternators, bumpers to resell, while  
Los Relámpagos del Norte  
sing of *tragos de amargo licor*  
*que no me hacen olvidar,*  
Los Cadetes de Linares cooing  
accordion classics that blare  
from a San Diego radio station  
announcing a Macy’s and Payless Shoe sale  
through an old gray radio  
hanging from the dusty limb  
of a manzanilla tree,  
deep red twisted trunk  
that gives shade  
to old  
roña ridden dogs  
that walk las colonias  
por las noches in packs,  
their ribs so defined  
    scratching scratching

deep red sores in the bending  
crevasses of his arms  
behind the leg  
over his belly chest  
while salted dust  
leave snot dirty  
with soot  
trace the brim  
of his fingernails  
frantic  
twitching  
t w i t c h i n g  
searching for a vein  
the lighter  
a spoon  
la piedra blanca  
and a quiet  
dark  
Ensenada night.

## Leonor

***“Afraid of Husbands, and the Law; Deportation Risk Grows for Abused Illegal Residents”***

*-New York Times Headline, April 1999*

On the street she hums a bolero, walking under a row of cypress trees with leaves that rattle the winds of April, a humid scent grows. A truck, dog barks, an ambulance far still. A song by Trio Los Dandy's. Tall kids stop bouncing a ball against a building the color of old bananas. “Ella está loca... por eso la dejó el marido,” others whisper. Months now she hums to the wind, to herons and roses, even before he threaten to take the child, before he swung white knuckles, before she sought refuge, whispered help me... but nothing. Long sleeves and make-up covered the excess of nights before, and again, again, like before, until that afternoon when she returned home to empty dresser drawers pulled out, hangers bare by her heavy coat, valise without documents, El Santo Niño de Atocha faced down, her saving from tips that she hid between Psalms and Proverbs, the child's knitted blanket: everything had disappeared. The siren of the ambulance louder now; she hides behind a cypress tree as it sings que sin embargo *sigues, unida a mi existencia, y si vivo cien años,*

*cien años pienso en ti...*

## Intérprete

*“Verás unas letras escritas allí  
con el nombre y la fecha  
y el día en que fallecí”  
-Los Alegres de Terán, en Sol mayor*

\*

practice the accordion scales  
three rows side by side  
circular black buttons  
on the pearl white  
Gabanelli  
*Sol, Fa*  
every morning  
to loosen the fingers  
refresh the sequence he calls  
*adoronos* always to start the song  
then in the middle, at the end  
tan tan  
*La, Re*  
then switch instruments  
el bajo sexto with twelve  
metal strings, his finger  
wide enough to cover two  
strings at once  
boom ta ta, boom ta ta, boom  
*Do, Mi*  
even Saturday and Sunday  
sounds of repetition bending down  
hallways to tickle  
in my ear, whispering  
*Si*  
awaken:  
“¡ya bebantó, mi’ja!”  
-sí  
“venga y siéntese... cante conmigo...”  
it’s song of a man who is sad because a woman left  
he sends her love messages by doves  
I love the sound of that word doves,  
*golondrinas*—But I don’t understand:  
I don’t know about cien años,  
el delirio, y el reloj que marca las horas.



\*

the shiny black boots are ready, white  
fringe along the long sleeves of a yellow shirt  
sequence and rhinestones  
black Stetson, curved up  
cologne smells from the white bottle with a  
little blue sailing boat, red words  
every night he gets ready:  
“Listo pal’ talón... m’ija, mis besos que me voy...”  
whistling, he picks up the accordion  
then I jump to grab his left foot  
my brother the right  
he steps forward, laughs with each drag,  
“¡Mis talones- aaaah! Ándale vieja, ayúdame...”

\*

lights in the hallway wake  
me, her shadow enters the room  
before she does-  
*ven, acaban de hablar un hombre, ven*  
*tómalo que no sé lo qué tanto me dice*  
dice que está en el hospital  
que vaya mamá, que está malo  
*¡deja de llorar y pregúntale que qué le pasó!*  
Chee wants to no eef hee weel bee okey...

## Anastacio

### **“Border Crossing Deaths Set a 12-Month Record”**

-Richard Maros, *Los Angeles Times*, October 1, 2005

En tiempos de escasez  
tostaba maíz hasta no  
poder más y ella lo molía  
para hacer café, aunque no  
sabe igual... luego  
ya no había maíz

*“It's overwhelming” said Dr. Bruce Parks, the chief medical examiner for Pima County, which includes Tucson. Outside Parks' office, a refrigerated tractor-trailer holds 60 bodies, mostly dead migrants, an overflow from the morgue. “This is an emergency for us.”*

Después no había ni pa' los animales  
Ya no queda nada... mi muchacho  
salió a buscar dónde sacar pa' comer

*“...death toll has swamped investigators whose job it is to identify and ship the remains...”*

Pal' norte no, no  
pa' ya no  
le dije a mi muchacho  
que no se fuera  
me dijo tata, tengo que irme

¡Ay! Padre Nuestro allá en los cielos  
te ruego de nuevo...  
ruego por él, mi Tacho, que  
anda en tierras muy ajenas  
Allá... muy lejos mi hijo

*“...remains unidentified. Some of their photographs appear in a grim book of John Does that people searching for loved ones study. Scars, tattoos or birthmarks often lead to positive identifications.”*

<sup>i</sup> noxocoyo...  
mazan cana  
tonatiuh iquizayan  
tonatiuh icalaquian

*“regional clothing such as shin-high boots worn by people from Chiapas help in identifications.”*

<sup>ii</sup> ca iman  
xihualahuian  
in icnopiltzintli  
in ixquichca nemi

in ci nauhcan...  
niquintzatzilia  
ni nonan, nana  
nomatca nehuatl,  
in quexquich cahuitl,  
ni xichie  
Ometeotl

*“death toll has swamped”*

Llevamos un mes esperando saber algo de él  
y esta angustia no me deja.. la sed no se me quita  
te lo encargo virgencita

*“found in the wash and sand...”*

te lo encargamos  
te lo encomendamos...  
si nos debes algo Dios blanco  
páganos  
en tu virgencita morena creemos  
por él...

---

<sup>i</sup> mi más pequeño,  
ten cuidado y no demores  
del ocaso del sol  
a la salida del sol

<sup>ii</sup> horita  
ayuda  
a este mi pobre niño  
donde quiera que more  
desde las cuatro direcciones  
te llamo  
yo su madre, mamá  
yo, el ser  
como sea de largo  
yo lo espero  
creador,  
Dios

**El Chuco Chronicles, 11/23/06**

*While Reading at Village Inn*

Mama, he's calling me names...

Knock it off and shut up! Leave your sister alone, goddamit so help me!

Don't tell me what to do, mooom!

I said, shut the hell up, now!

I, I hate you, stupid cow...

Shut the fuck up I said!

Let go of my hair mom, stop!

Mama, stop it, please

●●● (*tres*)

## Wall #7 (or Perspective Exercise)

*“Death froze his exhausted face. The attackers lashed or punctured nearly every part of his body... As with most murders in Ciudad Juárez, police found no witnesses, no weapons. Only the battered corpse on the steel coroner's table carries clues to who he was and how he died.” -Julie Watson, Associated Press Writer, March 8, 2009*

under the circular  
light above, a praying mantis'  
arm, he lies on the table, toe peeking out the white  
sheet, a cream colored tag, brown ring  
string tied to bulging pinky toe.

she cries more when he's  
wheeled back to a wall  
of small chrome doors.

[i don't know  
how to  
write a unique  
poem out of this]

## Wall #6 (or Young Brother)

*Pa' Teban*

in a rush to prove he's  
a bad vato loco  
his hand reached down, clip loaded  
he pulled the trigger, the powder  
scent on the right hand  
that once reached down  
to cover a pulsating hole  
on a camarada's chest  
left of the heart  
blood thick as *mole*

black rubber handle,  
machete upon a leg  
across a man's stomach  
through his temples  
like butter: sleep means  
you will see it again  
again, por vida

young hands turn to puños  
upon ribs, bursting an ear  
against gray walls of  
a county jail cell, knuckles  
bleed warmth that dries  
into red casts, coats stiff, then  
flakes off onto a stainless steel sink

ese carnal's arch of the upper back  
chest, arms, hands, legs, outside  
corner of the eye's frame:  
here are ties written  
with ink below the skin  
to a street  
city  
last name  
smile now, cry later faces  
Aztec feathers on the head dress  
of a woman with

lips parted but puckered.

the book of rocks  
remembers the  
stories beyond walls  
concrete corners  
asphalt boulevards  
allies, narrow  
driveways  
when Pachuco children  
hurled stones  
peeled strands from willows  
wore blessings, then  
sung salamander riddles  
atop stout reeds



## Wall #5 (or After Silence)

*"After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music."*

*-Aldous Huxley*

drip drip drop into  
a tower of plates cup pots

Doggy Doggy rests  
under sparse shade of the lemon tree  
bowl dry

but baby builds a wall with legos  
kicks it over with a tonka truck

captain crunch cereal from the tv  
"collect them all- in specially marked boxes, NOW!"

the garage door is open  
plywood table and a jar  
of washers bolts nuts  
but dad tapes over copper wires  
exposed under the orange cord-  
baby might touch it

radio la que buena waves in and out of tune  
*"para llevar, a mi amor..a. voy a buscar,  
un rinconcito en el cielo"*

but mom sleeps now, a long night  
after the chemotherapy-  
it has spread to the cortex.

## Wall #4

The slope of her breast  
against the inside  
of his arm  
like when he  
embraced her  
from behind

fried flour, garlic-  
potatoes  
made meals  
with anything

a thick box  
nail bent  
upward, dangling  
from it a mechanic shop  
calendar, two keys on  
one ring, a date  
circled in blue

putty filled oblong  
holes from nights  
when he swung

at stains, left,  
on the wall  
next to the sink  
where they once  
bathed  
their first born.

### Wall #3

Slopes groove inward  
bowl, arching  
up

soft pulls  
linear tugs

tracing the sides in  
variant tans  
roasted pink  
sheens blending in slants  
the canyon wall  
beyond  
undulating  
folds of a  
belly button.

Wall #2

For a good time call Dolores 337-2269!

**FAG CITY!**

READ John 3:16, sinner!!!

*Rudy Luvs Jenny por vida!*

**No War for OIL!**

*Emo is crap!*

*face blasted against a cold  
cinder block wall  
"por favor no me mate..."  
blade clinched  
pressed to the  
pulse in the dip  
at the base of the throat  
"drop the bags, don't  
move bitch"*

*Tony sucks cock!*

**Wetbacks go home!**

*Life is useless...*

**then kill yourself asshole!!**

*hand reaches down  
skirt up, moist hand  
pulls panties to the side  
hard, hot, dry  
thrust up, again, again  
only tip toes try to balance  
"oh god!"*

~~XXX~~ *por vida!*

**ME LA MAMAS WEY!**

*hand crushes the air to muffled  
gasps  
thrust thrust  
tries to move but hand reaches up  
rams the head hard hard thrust*

**Fuck all H8R skank bitches!!!**

*God Bless America*

*warmth  
trickling down the left temple  
both legs  
a wad of hair pulled as velcro*

**Cowboy Up!**

**Kill the Rag Heads!**

*"Did you see his face, ma'am?  
"She don't understand, man..."  
"Quiere sabo si tú viste el cara el hombre"  
"Anything would help, lady..."  
"Yo ayuda, so tu diga todo ya que paso"*

**Mean people suck-nice people SWALLOW!**

**↑ Fuckin Lame!!**

La Angel Eyes was here

## Wall #1

Las cuatro paredes sin techo  
aún no desmenuzadas  
cascarones del emplaste blanco  
como pedazos de concha  
sobre tierra compacta  
el peso de años, tejido de adobes  
brillan bajo el sol de julio, tiempo  
en que los surcos de la milpa se cosechan  
en lo plano del cerro

Los marcos de madera torcidos, astillas  
levantadas recorren el grano y los clavos  
gruesos escurren rojo café mientras  
cuadran vistas del cerro y la carretera  
angosta frente al Camposanto  
donde el tiempo seca y tierra se sume  
se parte se abre entre  
lápidas de mármol blanco  
entre las cruces de  
madera con letras de molde

La puerta de la cocina sale al lavadero  
de fondo, detrás, cerca de un tinaco  
aguarda un pocillo de peltre azul,  
junta agua que en julio no cae  
ahí, entre los siete árboles infértiles quietos  
duermen los trece hijos en hamacas  
entre ramas, vistas a la luna  
Tío Meño con la guitarra en el pecho en DO mayor  
cantaba, *“el cielo tengo por techo, nomás  
el sol por cobija, dos brazos pa’ mantenerte...”*

Las paredes sin techo han visto  
secarse el cerro, la concepción  
y largos partos de hijos que salieron  
hacia el norte, pero no antes que  
sus manos formaran estos adobes quietos-  
me llaman abrir la boca  
sacar la lengua  
probar el rojo café.

●●●● (*cuatro*)

## Willy Carlitos Williams y la rose que no sirve

*"The fragility of the flower/ unbruised/ penetrates space."*

the fragility of  
penetrating space  
feels bruised  
after carving heavy bone:  
here, in between  
there is  
    life, remembering the taste  
of soil as not rancid, sino es  
un nudo en la garganta  
del tamaño de  
la piedra del molcajete,  
y la carga de cebolla  
recién picada  
debajo de los ojos





## Famosas estrellas

Modesto summers turn the black asphalt roads  
to moving ripples, like the water  
at James Marshal pool, too far to walk, too much to get in.  
Ni modo, so Chata and I go inside to watch tv, drink  
tooth-grinding purple cool-aid con hielitos  
in plastic jumbo cups, then Chata calls Rey,  
su novio, on the phone. He's thirteen, but it's still  
true love at first sight  
por vida baby, she says,

whispers how much she misses him, so he promises to come  
over after work from the Rocket Tire Shop in front  
of Nation Market at 'four corners'  
where they first met when she was buying her favorite  
after school chuchuluco, la 32 oz. Pepsi and a bag  
of saladitos con limón.

"Tonight, mijo?" she says and is real excited  
until su madre y Tía mía comes through the backdoor.  
Chata hangs up real quick when the screen door slams.  
I flip the channels. We're just watching tv, I say, but Tía  
yells at Chata for not doing her que haceres, niña floja!

No one will marry a lazy girl, she says  
so Chata begins to wash the dishes, sweep the kitchen floor real good  
crumbs of tortillas, chicken bones under the table cuz her brothers  
son unos puercos que parecen que comen con  
las pata; she smiles and sweeps faster.

I see her cleaning real good  
I know Chata and Rey will be together  
always and forever  
each moment with you  
it's just like a dream to me  
that somehow came true  
I know cuz she sings all day every day.

I know Chata will sneak out at night, Tía will yell cry slap  
her, then her belly will grow, pressed out against the t-shirt  
until water run down her legs and it hurts when coming out.  
Then she'll push a stroller down the street,  
por la calle León, drop out but come

after school for all to see her baby. We'll become más  
y más apartadas... I'll miss her.  
So maybe I'll have a baby too, to roll juntas  
por la calle León.  
But I need a Rey first.  
I'm old enough to know boyfriends make babies when they hold  
your hand, make blue purple marks all over your  
neck that Chata calls chupetes, even though  
they look like bruises the police left  
on Big Smiley's face last week.

I need a Rey; it must be Pedrito Fernández  
who sings La Mochila Azul on tv and movies,  
he sings to me porque yo tengo los ojitos dormilones-  
if it has to be a boy, it's him, que me chupeteé...

I know he will love me because when we were kids,  
we'd climb into the abandoned blue bus behind the housing  
project where we lived, mama called it 'la vecindad'  
because she said the neighbors knew all your chismes y que no  
te podías echar un pedo sin que lo supieran todos.  
Yo y la Chata would climb into the rusty bus  
through shattered glass, jump on the seats, rip the springs  
for bracelets, sit on the steering wheel trying not to fall off.

Central Valley air thick, it was twice as hot inside  
but we didn't care cuz we were famosas estrellas,  
artistas, cantantes, famous Mexican singers with shiny  
short dresses, big bracelets, mucho make up  
in the blue bus on our way  
to *Siempre en Domingo* con Raul Velasco,  
where we would meet  
otras famosas estrellas like Menudo  
Timbiriche y claro, mi novio Pedrito Fernández  
que me cantaría solamente a mí.

And we'd arrive to the studios in Mexico City  
a los foros de Televisa, S.A. de C.V,  
bien arregladitas, muy pintaditas  
everyone happy taking pictures  
with of us, me and Pedrito,  
everyone waiting for us, for me  
eager to take pictures  
him holding my hand  
por vida  
always and forever.

## Applications in Neuroplasticity

like this man who once slept under  
newspapers and grew back  
the riddled leg he left over seas,  
it is important to  
retain the ability to reorganize  
neural pathways  
based on new experiences  
    unless *legato* reverses and sound  
    no longer presses onward

to be persistent means remembering  
when he first saw her, hair pinned up, white gloves-  
it means functional changes  
in the brain, ∴ new knowledge, but there must be  
*tenuto*, as in waves from a song that hold  
or play slightly louder from a mahogany RCA  
tuning in and out

    yet the want to learn may mean un-memorizing,  
    new movements from old grooves  
    image a different sound, remembering  
    that a dynamic mark is sometimes for  
    forgetting: coda

## Missing Virgins

*“As Alan Gilbert recently wrote, ‘form is never more than an extension of culture.’ And culture is as loaded as an empty signifier looking for a trigger.” -Kristin Prevallet, The Exquisite Extremes of Poetry (Watten and Baraka on the Brink), Jacket 12, July 2000*

Before anyone knew, just like a tight braid  
loosened after a long day of pull, La Virgen escaped  
from the glass case in the cathedral de Tonalá Jalisco.

La Virgen Morena, Santísima Madre de México  
is also missing from El Cerro del Tepeyac.

Only soft saintly silhouettes are left  
on San Francisco and Salinas street murals  
as my Tarahumara tías and Yaqui cousins cry  
to see their altar Madre Santa gone.

Even Luis Valdéz cancelled the Christmas play  
in San Juan Bautista, and cyber chatters in Peru y Barcelona  
discuss the possibilities of what could have happened

to all  
the missing virgins

who left empty ovals everywhere,  
almost matrices,  
missing Mariás from truck mudflaps,  
from dangling trinkets inside family Durango vans  
missing from flea market \$10 gold plastic clocks  
with the holographic moving Mary’s,  
missing from 3 for 10 t-shirts,  
homeboy tattoos  
and ranfla artwork

But I will tell no one that you’ve waited for the time  
of the Sixth Sun to rotate the axis of your frown  
to drop your hands from its pious cusp

that you moved like a seed deep in cracked soil,  
loosened by rain drops,  
moved smoothly like leche swirls in café

I will not say you are high above

in the thick mist of *Oventic*,  
face covered below  
the eyes in a red Zapatista cloth,  
that you speak Tzetal  
Tzotzil,  
Chol  
and Tojolabal  
from your nose  
    left ear  
    unbraided hair,  
    small toe,  
    from the side of your hip,  
    the shoulders,  
    right arm, hand,  
    right index  
    trigger finger.

## Pocho Love

*“Mexican words of the day: BUTTER and LETTUCE- I wanna marry my ruca, butter mother won’t lettuce.”  
-Forwarded email joke*

That boys’ mama made weenies scrambled con huevos  
scooped up with tortillas or white wonder bread  
or whatever else you can moosh flat to scoop and hold,  
made yellow cheese quesadillas from the bar of cheese  
she got at the county free food line where she stood  
every Wednesday after work and came home with a box  
labeled USDA and said “gracias a Dios.”

That boys’ brother would say, “Tráime la ketchup y Tapatio  
foolio!” and the boy had to cuz he was younger, cuz when  
it mattered, his carnal had his back, never let him get jumped,  
snuck into the movies a few burritos, grape soda  
in his Dickies, and when it got dark you could hear  
the pressure pop and he’d say, *órale*.

That boys’ Spanish is sprinkled with breakas  
trockas que parkea en la Wal Mar pa’ comprar  
China-made shirts that are cheap like taunts  
from the real Mexicanos that mock  
his lost Michoacán memory.

That boy may hold a number in a mugshot  
may die in a sappy Southside drive-by,  
may marry his high school ruca and have  
pocho children who will sing lullabies of ‘Angel Baby,’  
dream of perfect quinceañeras with chambelanes  
65’ Chevy Impalas with bando smooth  
patches and walk around the mall  
on weekends de la mano  
wear an air brush t-shirt with  
a heart saying *Lalo lvs Mousy Por Vida*.

## december in santa cruz

Fingers cold, I sit in this empty apartment by the beach, more room than I've ever had, write long research papers to prove I understand theories, diasporas with philosophies that only work on paper, type faster, procrastinated because I wasn't sure what I was arguing, now write... make it up fast, like lying, don't stop, go, run, runny nose, so I wrap myself in a blanket of many colored patches of San Joaquin fields,

*Driving slow through fog  
thick as polyester pulled from a pillow--  
it nestled rows  
rows of strawberries,  
color seeping through-- there, close to the ground,  
long sleeves smear on defrosted windshields in Watsonville...*

mother made this blanket long ago with fabrics left over from when she'd cut sew hem mend to make extra feriecita so we could have a chorizo con huevo breakfast, real milk instead of leche de polvo in the USDA white package; my brother that kept the blanket in his Chevy truck, said keep it here, then hugged me goodbye, walked to the door, turned, said, I don't get it,

*She is too sad to see me go away:  
why can't you stay home... there's a college here, mi'ja...  
We hug goodbye at the front door- my siblings line up to hug me.  
Amá, vengo los fines de semana, so, no se preocupe, ok mom? No me voy para siempre...  
She knows this, but still cries as I grip her old orange suitcase, in my other hand a bag  
with egg, bean, chorizo burritos,  
para el camino, she says. And hugs me again.*

what you're doing in here Cruz, but I'm happy for you if you are, he came back, hugged me, as if he knew that I wouldn't see him in many months, as if he knew that like when we were kids, the heater in this apartment wouldn't work; we watched tv wrapped in blankets, two, three shirts, extra socks to keep calentitos around the tiny house so tiny tiny tiny inyti nytiny, no room to have anything but cold runny noses.

*I lie.*

I Lie.

My brother never came to drop me off. Siblings were in school; that morning she left early. She made no burritos. I was alone packing a gray dufflebag I bought at the second hand on 9<sup>th</sup> Street, socks, school supplies, shampoo, a small blade at the bottom by the admissions letter.

She said, "the cannery is hiring, why leave...  
you can work in the office- it even pays more."

I have to...

"...pues vete si quieres... vete."

## No creas

*"I think I will do nothing for a long time but listen, and accrue what I hear into myself..."*

*-Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, from Chant 26*

no creas que dedico estrofas enteras a la memoria  
de tu amor  
ni que los descuidos y vistas hacia el monte  
son porque me acuerdo del Fourth of July cuando  
te explotó el cohete en la mano  
y gritaste  
"¿cómo chingados voy a tocar el acordeón así?"  
nos reímos hasta verte  
la piel negra quemada y de repente  
sonreíste al ver que casi llorábamos

no creas que se me olvida  
el olor a cigarrillo y cerveza hasta en el billete  
de cinco  
que me dabas para  
mi domingo  
yo quería una mariposa monarca gigantesca  
para volar  
por la orilla del río Sacramento y buscar gatos perdidos  
en los árboles que se mecían  
de día y bajo la luna robusta  
cantaban de tragos  
amargos y jinetes huastecos  
me decías que mejor gastarlo  
en algo que disfrute el paladar y el oído

me acuerdo  
que escribo en español  
porque mañana, me decías  
se te puede olvidar  
como se le olvida al árbol

la hoja que se cayó en la corriente el  
otoño pasado



## Instructions:

When it hurts, unfold the arms, deflate  
the organs, take the heart out, rip the charred  
log back, roll the beating mass in loose ash.

[See Diagram 2]

The shape of a triangle is strongest weight-bearing  
but yours lost shape, like water falling out a clear plastic  
bag, tiny fish wide eyed and gasping.

Go with what is left: no one will  
sing over your bones.

[  
Diagram 2]

November 2, 2007

I last saw you a year ago, dancing among altares ajenos filled  
with pastries, tequila, brown cinnamon sticks  
yellow candles in tall thick glasses; I saw you dip into bowls of  
water.

-Travieso, me dije,  
peeking out the center of a Paracho guitar while a man played  
un son jarocho, sitting, his leg crossed,  
te oí cantar:

cantando el gustito estaba,  
cuando me quedé dormido,  
cuando me quedé dormido,  
cantando el gustito estaba,  
Ay la la la,  
Ay la la la...

This is the time of beckoning  
copal scents tickle the four winds, white sugar skulls gaze  
behind shiny purple sequins  
encircled in the eyes  
thin paper cut-outs of calacas, La Katrina's hat  
loops widely;  
cempasúchiles anaranjadas  
machacados los pétalos en olores retumbantes  
en la nariz; the scents will help to guide back

*The direction of the Dead: south children, east men, west women,  
north elders:*

wander around if you must, but this is your place.  
Aquí está tu lugar, esta fotografía, tú con el traje azul,  
lentejuelas doradas, el acordeón Gabanelli blanco  
tirantes de vaqueta estampados *Los Caracoles de Durango*, fecha  
al dorso-1984;  
tengo pan, una pizca de sal  
the leather belt with your initials  
a pomegranate open  
each granule encased, stacked  
your driver's license  
white button shirt with an  
embroidered red peacock  
that yellows around the collar

Te espero aquí  
donde me quedé  
a donde me trajiste.  
Aquí vivo como trabajo duermo  
sueño sola  
aquí  
en el norte me dejaste.

The candle is small  
flowers limp  
water low  
salt lumps-  
I know the north is far;  
perhaps that is why you,  
father, are not here.  
Or because I told you  
it hurts to love you.  
Since I said I hide anger in  
a bottom drawer, back  
behind torn blouses.

## Nepantla

*“The term is a Nahuatl (Aztec language) term connoting in between or a reference to the space of the middle.”*

cut words in worn ears  
cracked eyebrows  
above  
rusty eyes,  
tin roots  
bulge on cheeks  
crumble-  
words skid  
off the mouth  
    crack the tongue  
timber on tonsils  
gags whole phrases.

child: the edge of  
a radio song  
is all you get.  
mumble-  
bee coz  
thos wurdz  
mus stei at houm.



## Vita

Verónica E. Guajardo began at the community college and her love of rocks and writing placed her in a unique position among her peers, tutoring on stalagmites and composition thesis statements. This would produce two fundamental life decisions: study what you love, (Letters) and work in what you're passionate about (educational equity for underrepresented students). Thus Guajardo left the professional world and returned to graduate school in 2006 to study what she loves, and will graduate in May 2009, to return again to what she's passionate about: educational access. She has been a manager, administrator, project coordinator, Rio Grande Review Co-Editor, Creative Writing department worker bee (webpage, office, brochure, alumni page) Creative Writing and Freshman Composition instructor, database analyst, and other jobs that were harder, paid less, but built the worker ethic she now possesses. She co-founded the Barbed Wire Open Mic Night while at UTEP, held the last Saturday of each month (of semester) at the Percolator Café, where she enjoyed hearing the live literary pulse of El Chuco's writes. Her fiction, poetry and music have been published in anthologies and literary magazines such as Tortilla Soup for the Spirit, *Ollin: Movimeinto Música*, Hecho en Califaz, *PoetryTelevision.Com*, La Revista, Flies, Cockroaches and Poets, In the Grove (translation, Editor Lee Herrick), the UTEP MFASO Chapbooks (three thus far), and is co-editor to an upcoming anthology Tumblewords of the Southwest.

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This thesis was typed by Verónica E. Guajardo, font Garamond, 12 pt, heading font 14, on a sturdy Dell Laptop.