

2021-12-01

## Rooting for Spices

Carlos Emilio Rodriguez  
*University of Texas at El Paso*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.utep.edu/open\\_etd](https://scholarworks.utep.edu/open_etd)

---

### Recommended Citation

Rodriguez, Carlos Emilio, "Rooting for Spices" (2021). *Open Access Theses & Dissertations*. 3449.  
[https://scholarworks.utep.edu/open\\_etd/3449](https://scholarworks.utep.edu/open_etd/3449)

This is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UTEP. For more information, please contact [lweber@utep.edu](mailto:lweber@utep.edu).

ROOTING FOR SPICES

ROD CARLOS RODRIGUEZ

Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

APPROVED:

---

Tim Z. Hernandez, M.F.A., Chair

---

Sasha R. Pimentel, M.F.A.

---

Andrea Cote Botero, Ph.D.

---

Elidio La Torre Lagares, Ph.D.

---

Stephen L. Crites Jr., Ph.D.  
Dean of the Graduate School

Copyright ©

by

Rod Carlos Rodriguez

2021

Dedication:

I dedicate this work to my wife, Sabina, whose clear vision and pure love I aspire to.

I also dedicate this work to the silent voices of Puerto Rico, past and present. I hope I have done them justice in my efforts to reclaim what was lost.

Finally, this work is dedicated to all of Puerto Rico's unsung martyrs and heroes fighting for freedom and independence.

Soy Antillano.

ROOTING FOR SPICES

by

ROD CARLOS RODRIGUEZ

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

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Department of Creative Writing

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

December 2021

## Acknowledgements

To my wife, Sabina, this grumpy old poet in no way, shape, or form deserves your love and affection. This thesis and the completion of my MFA would most definitely not be possible without your unflinching, determined energy in making sure I stick to my studies every step of the way. I find with great surprise you continue to choose me in your life.

To the Sun Poet's Society who, after 25 years, have shown me so many walks of life, so many ways to be inspired from voices around the world. I am humbled to be counted among you.

To the students, faculty, and staff of the University of Texas at El Paso, specifically in the Online MFA Creative Writing Program – Professor Tim Z. Hernandez, Professor Sasha Pimentel, Dr. Andrea Cote Botero, Dr. Paula Cucurella, Professor Daniel Chacon, and Dr. Elidio La Torre Lagares. I am extremely thankful for your kind encouragement, your passion, and your inspiration of this poet's development. I would not have developed as much as I have as a writer without your efforts and genuine desire for my growth.

The poem, "Columbus Day", has appeared in my previous poetry collection, *Native Instincts*, under my former pen name, Rod Carlos Stryker.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....v

Project.....ix

Poetics and Assessment.....xi

Framework.....xxiv

Works Cited.....xxix

Bibliography.....xxxi

I

1. Rooting for Spices.....2

2. Xabao and the Cemi.....3

3. Gente in Silence.....6

4. Salomé Waits.....8

5. Creator’s Curse.....9

6. Hummingbird Blues.....12

7. Deminan and the Sea Turtle.....14

8. Struggle and Silence.....15

9. Columbus Day.....16

10. Yahíma.....18

II

11. Juan’s Fever.....20

12. Cristóbal.....22

13. John White’s 4<sup>th</sup> Voyage.....23

14. Maboya and Cofresí.....25

15.	Diablo of San Cristobal.....	27
16.	Campeche and the God of Storms.....	29
17.	Arroyo de Atabey.....	34
18.	Jacinto, <i>Dame la Vaca</i> .....	35
19.	Francisco, Betances, Spanish Crowns, and the Devil.....	36
III		
20.	Julia De Burgos and Jurakán.....	38
21.	Flora, Caciques, and Deminan.....	39
22.	Luis and Flora.....	41
23.	Xiorro and the Sun.....	43
24.	Bodega Lights.....	45
25.	Lares de Oro.....	47
26.	A Jibaro’s Son.....	48
27.	A Footnote to a Jibaro’s Son.....	49
28.	Words, Words, and Cantos.....	50
29.	Ponce, Murdered.....	51
30.	Places and Dominance.....	53
31.	Recipe for Illumination.....	54
32.	The Stare.....	56
33.	Blanquito and the Sun.....	58
34.	Mal Oro.....	59
35.	Pots and Pans and Reggaeton.....	60
36.	Playa Sucia in Twilight.....	61

37.	Suma.....	62
38.	Curriculum Vitae.....	64

## Project

The overarching theme of my thesis combines elements of magical realism with historical people, events, indigenous (Taino/Borike'n) spirituality, and folktales. Specifically, I researched, learned, wrote about, and explored the island's dense history, political struggles, and importance to the colonizing countries of Spain and the United States. The proposed project required significant research time to depict these subjects, people, places, and stories with greater accuracy. I used what I discovered and applied it in chronological sections depicting the island's historical narrative. I also attempted to employ a process of historical recall referred to as postmemory by Marianne Hirsch. She describes it as the "relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch 103). My poems characterized or symbolized the stories, people, places, and events in three sections. They portray the amount of (or lack thereof) historical, spiritual, and folkloric resources that were available.

The preface section at the beginning of the book is followed by three sections containing poems for each section. Poetry styles range from prose, free verse, essay, epic verse, structured, and code-switching. Temporal and spatial variations and aspects are fluid from one poem to the next or even within the poems themselves. First, second, and third person perspectives are utilized throughout the collection. This allows multiple viewpoints and presents a richer, more diverse reading experience to the work as a whole.

Additionally, philosophical and spiritual aspects from diverse sources were researched and explored in my writing. They relate to my development and focus from the time I started writing forty years ago to today. Specifically, I used anecdotal experiences detailing their

implications in both my writing style as well as the overall connection to spiritual touchstones that direct my journey as a poet. Research emphasis was also made in relation to Neoplatonic studies involving the pursuit of Henosis (Greek word for Divine Work, Roman equivalent would be Magnum Opus), spiritual/philosophical concepts centered around the four aspects of the alchemical process, and the origin story of the caracaraol. Many author's works I've learned of throughout the progression of my Bachelor's and Master's studies, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Martin Heidegger, and Marianne Hirsch, influenced my poetry as it related to the genre of Magical Realism and the spiritual/philosophical origin stories from the Puerto Rican and Taino/Borike'n traditions. The following sections of this preface detail the many influential and inspiring writers and collections that have impacted this thesis.

## Poetics and Assessments

Throughout my upbringing, I was fed a daily serving of white-washed history that centered on cultural beliefs promoting how remarkable the United States was and how fortunate we should all be to have a role (however minimal as a minority) in its continued dominance in the world. This was not only perpetuated by the public-school systems, but it was also reinforced by my family and friends. I was given vague hints of a place called Puerto Rico where my distant grandparents and their relatives used to live. Otherwise, I was discouraged from learning Spanish, being denied a true education of my ancestral culture, history, or identifying with others of my heritage. This caused enormous difficulties in my attempts to find my place in a white dominated American culture. Religion or spirituality were not emphasized in my family and as a result, I could not look to any type of spiritual anchor to keep me stable or centered.

Fortunately, I was introduced to a deep, decidedly raw spiritual (re)awakening in *Borderlands / La Frontera* by Gloria Anzaldúa. There is a combination of genres in the book such as poetry, essays, biographies, theoretical philosophy, and spirituality. It spans the author's early childhood and is based on the hard lessons of living on the Texas/Mexico border. It was a difficult life for Anzaldúa, and she worked diligently to survive a cultural, familial, and religious patriarchy determined to keep her oppressed and marginalized,

“Culture is made by those in power-men. Males make the rules and laws, women transmit them...the culture and the Church insist the women are subservient to males. For a woman of my culture there used to be only three directions she could turn: to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother...some of us have a fourth choice: entering the world by way of education and career and becoming self-autonomous persons” (Anzaldúa 38-39).

Anzaldúa grew up with in a small, US/Mexico border town called Raymondville, Texas. Much like my own Puerto Rican culture, it was and, in many ways, still is a deeply male-dominated culture. The cultural oppression was more pronounced with Anzaldúa as a woman and I acknowledge as a Latino male, that I did not suffer such oppression. As an ally however, it sickens me and challenges me to stand with women, especially of the Latina cultures, and fight against male-dominated oppression. It has inspired me to highlight in some of my poetry the struggles of the female figures in my thesis poems.

Anzaldúa also explores her ancestral indigenous spirituality in *Borderlands / La Frontera* dating back to before the cultural domination of the United States, the colonial Spaniards, and even the patriarchal Aztecs,

“The male-dominated Azteca-Mexica culture drove the powerful female deities underground by giving them monstrous attributes and by substituting male deities in their place, thus splitting the female Self and the female deities. They divided her who had been complete, who possessed both upper (light) and underworld (dark) aspects” (Anzaldúa 49).

This exploration of pre-Christian and even pre-Aztec spirituality gives her and her work a much-needed grounding in her continual examination of the innate spiritual self to the point that she discovers an aspect of herself as it relates to what she calls her shadow beast. She describes her shadow beast as, “that part of me that hates constraints of any kind. At the least hint of limitations on my time and space by others, it kicks out with both feet. Bolts” (Anzaldúa 38). This has a core resonance for me and once I understood how this shadow beast protected Anzaldúa from authoritarian people and situations, I realized how I too have throughout my life

kicked out with both feet. This practice has allowed me to continuously explore my unique place both in this world as well as in the world of writing and spirituality.

I also relish how Anzaldúa uses multiple code-switching techniques in *Borderlands / La Frontera* to adequately describe various thoughts, emotions, histories, and philosophies challenging the average reader to work hard for comprehension. This technique of code-switching is an example of how Anzaldúa's book informs my thesis. I too employed code-switching to write my poetry to express my thoughts, emotions, spirituality, and philosophies more accurately. Principally, what speaks to my thesis in relation to *Borderlands / La Frontera* is how Anzaldúa unflinchingly delves into her ancestral and spiritual identity even as the dominant culture has attempted to dissuade her efforts. I am keenly aware that the dominant culture has tried to blind me to my ancestral, cultural, and spiritual explorations as well. Even my parents, much like Anzaldúa's parents, tried hard to raise me with a colonized mind. They dissuaded my brothers and I from learning Spanish, as it was considered objectionable to speak anything but American English.

Given the marginalization of alternate beliefs and spirituality that affect a broadening, more global populace, Gloria Anzaldúa's other inspirational work, *Light in the Dark*, speaks to my thesis as well because her message provides a social treatise on being a spiritual activist. "Chamanas, curanderas, artistas, and spiritual activists, like nepantleras, are liminal people, at the thresholds of form, forever betwixt and between. They move among different realities and psychic states, journeying beyond the natural order or status quo and into other worlds" (Anzaldúa 31). Although the concept of spiritual activism seems contradictory, spirituality and activism can work hand in hand. Anzaldúa's *Light in the Dark* also helps the reader to transcend

borders and thereby allow a greater connection to themselves and others through becoming what she calls *la nepantlera*, or one who inhabits two or more worlds,

“I find people using metaphors such as ‘Borderlands’ in a more limited sense than I had meant it, so to expand on the psychic and emotional borderlands I’m now using ‘nepantla.’ With nepantla the connection to the spirit world is more pronounced as is the connection to the world after death, to psychic spaces. It has a more spiritual, psychic, supernatural, and indigenous resonance” (Anzaldúa editors introduction).

Specifically, this is accomplished by finding a greater connection to ourselves through becoming one's own bridge as represented by that which dominant cultures may marginalize: our *otherness*. This occurs in direct rebellion to what the dominant culture deems heretical or evil. Searching for and discovering this unique spirituality not dominated by organized religion's hegemony involves a spiritual activism illustrated by living and embodying *la nepantlera*. Through this path of nepantla, one is able to pursue a higher, more interconnected and communal consciousness and knowledge (*conocimiento*) that also acts as a lightning rod for social change.

Anzaldúa's *Light in the Dark* was my first introduction to a concise and well-conceptualized perception of the writer/artist/shaman being a bridge between the cosmos/spiritual/higher consciousness and the real world. Its elemental, spiritual ideas broke through my mentally colonized, oppressive, and self-imposed boundaries. Much like Anzaldúa, these restrictive cultural and patriarchal beliefs were forcibly constructed by the dominant society during my formative years. This instinctive connection of spirituality and reality not tied to Christian religious hegemony helped in my pursuit of an equivalent spiritual connection within the Taino/Borike'n beliefs. Miraculously, I discovered that same spiritual/reality bridge connection through the Taino/Puerto Rican origin story of Deminan, the original caracaracol.

Her work and mine share common ground through indigenous empowerment and spiritual activism. However, there is a difference to Anzaldúa's foundational spiritual awakening, as it is more tied into feminist and LGBTQ+ empowerment.

In terms of writing genres, I was naturally drawn to magical realism. My first introduction to it was through the book *The People of Paper* by Salvador Plascencia. It is a book of immense layering with multiple perspectives, a constant breaking of the fourth wall, as well as multiple appearances of the author portraying two characters, himself, and the planet Saturn. It is also a book of lost love and the many characters who suffer this tragedy. The author's imagery has layer upon layer of impossible situations and scenes that are also absolutely plausible. There is a woman made entirely of paper and a Mexican wrestling saint (Santos – Juan Meza) and a saint (Cameroon) who has a brief relationship with the book's author. The whole novel itself becomes part of the story. Plascencia's words in *The People of Paper* paint pictures that are at once surrealistic but also musical. It is also a book on, of, and about sadness. The multi-focused narration also has elements of "gonzo journalism," a journalistic style of writing often associated with Hunter S. Thompson. Specifically, *gonzo journalism* is a method of writing whereupon the author physically becomes immersed in the world or realm of his subjects as an active participant ("Understanding Gonzo"). In Plascencia's book, the character called Saturn and the author's real name interchangeably become part of the story. Characters in Plascencia's book even escape the novel and confront the author as the story unfolds. The book acts as a long, meandering method of written therapy due to the omniscient narrator's (author's) deeply broken heart.

Other sections of Plascencia's novel that stand out and inform my thesis include chapter six, specifically Santos-Juan Mesa, a saint AND a Mexican luchador, who inhabits the seemingly real world, avoids revealing his *sainthood*, and prefers a more human existence. "Santos" as a

concept of mixing magical (mythical/religious/fantastical) characters with realistic environments/tableaus/scenes is what sparked my very real appreciation for this genre of writing. As much as some writers and journalists despise magical realism as a genre (Sdrigotti), I find it integral and unique in capturing the multicultural, multi-spiritual experience of Puerto Rico and its contentious, violent past.

As the book itself (and the author) progressively becomes part of the story (breaking and/or decimating the fourth wall), I slowly realized how the story ultimately has to do with lost love and sadness. Not even the object of the author's unrequited love is sacrosanct. Plascencia's writing alone is lyrical/poetic/musical in quality and discipline. It informs greatly the level and skill of writing I aspire to in my thesis as well as my writing in general. *The People of Paper* departs from my thesis project in that my focus was on multiple people, places, histories, fables, myths, and indigenous traditions. I employed a level of multifocality in my work not restricted to a single town (like El Monte), but an entire island and its varied, multiethnic people.

The political struggles of Puerto Rico have been an enormous source of interest and concern for me. Thanks to Dr. Paula Cucurella's recommendation, I read Martín Espada's *The Lover of a Subversive Is Also a Subversive*. It is a collection of essays and commentaries that touches on well-known and lesser-known writers who have inspired Espada. It also speaks about the political climate of Puerto Rico, past and present, "Puerto Rico is the oldest colony in the world: four centuries under Spain and more than a century under the United States. In five hundred and seventeen years, Puerto Rico has not determined its own destiny for five minutes" (Espada 11). Puerto Rico's continued political status under the U.S. occupation, according to Espada, is because it is "a throwback to the days of gunboat diplomacy and the handlebar mustache" (Espada 12). In other words, despite Puerto Rico's status as a Commonwealth

territory, it is frozen in the political past, when decisions were made by a cavalier, hegemonic United States government. However, it is the mention of the independence movement in Puerto Rico that I found especially inspiring. Espada speaks of the movement's "peak in the mid-1930s with the rise of the Nationalist Party, spearheaded by a fiercely brilliant Harvard lawyer, Pedro Albizu Campos... Two years later, Albizu and seven other leaders were rounded up by the U.S. government and charged with seditious conspiracy" (Espada 13). I have a fast and easy kinship with those seeking self-determination. The fact that Campos and others risked everything for Puerto Rican independence provides a keen, bittersweet poignancy to my poetry.

Other sections of the book include thoughts on his origins as a poet lawyer, his views on Puerto Rico's history of colonialism, and those poets who rebelled against both Spain and the United States. There are also sections praising his mentor, Jack Agüeros, his thoughts on unspoken places in relation to poetry, a commentary on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, thoughts on poets during the Vietnam War, and finally Espada talks about his rebuttal in relation to a famous quotation by Percy Bysshe Shelly, "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (Espada 87).

Additional sections of Espada's book stood out to me. The section titled, "Through Me Many Long Dumb Voices," contains a description by the author of Lee Master's Spoon River Anthology published in 1915. He mentions how "the series of 244 poetic monologues, in nineteen linked narratives spoken by the dead people of Spoon River cemetery" is basically a method of "combining fact, fiction, imagination, and speculation" (Espada 2). This is fundamentally the very definition of Magical Realism. And it is no surprise Espada would be inspired by this type of writing.

Another aspect that inspired me was the title section of Espada's book, "The Lover of a Subversive Is Also a Subversive." It gives a brief history of colonialism in Puerto Rico. Many of Espada's remarks about the political oppression that occurred in Puerto Rico are confirmed in a collection of political and historical essays titled *Puerto Rico Under Colonial Rule: Political Persecution and the Quest for Human Rights*. Both books speak to the type of political and historical contexts that many of my poems contain. The essays in the middle of Espada's book give reflections on writers and mentors who have inspired him, which is a departure from my collection of work.

Continuing with political literary sources of inspiration, *Puerto Rico Under Colonial Rule: Political Persecution and the Quest for Human Rights*, edited by Ramón Bosque-Perez and José Javier Colón Morera, is a compelling collection of essays detailing the historic, political, economic, and basic human exploitation of Puerto Rico (and Puerto Ricans). This exploitation is described as principally committed by the United States but also by the former Spanish colonialist system. The book itself is broken up into three parts including political persecution during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more recent contemporary issues, as well as the flashpoint incident on the island of Vieques, off Puerto Rico's east coast.

There are three sections in this collection that speak to aspects of my thesis that I include in my poetry. Those sections include "Political Persecution against Puerto Rican Anti-Colonial Activists in the Twentieth Century," "Imprisonment and Colonial Domination, 1898-1958," and all of Part III detailing the events leading up to and including the protests against the US Navy (and the US government in general) on the island of Vieques. The struggles by many noted political figures in these areas such as Captain Miguel Enriquez, Roberto Cofresí, and Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos provide fertile material. My poems detail what mi gente have had to endure and

continue to endure as a colony (even under the recent veneer of *Commonwealth*) for over a century under the oppression of the United States.

Inspiration from the confrontations and oppression of Puerto Ricans described in *Puerto Rico Under Colonial Rule: Political Persecution and the Quest for Human Rights* is featured in such poems as “Maboya and Cofresi” and “Bodega Lights” in my thesis collection, among others. Where my work departs from the book is how I incorporate elements of Magical Realism and folklore in the poems of this thesis. By incorporating these additional elements, the work is given more depth and scope as well as a richer experience for the reader.

It is Part III of the book about Vieques and the US Naval expropriations of the 1940’s, that I am heavily influenced. The specific egregious methods the US Navy (and the US Government) took to force people off their land is an enormous source of inspiration, especially in relation to the *agregados* who had no rights or privileges while being forcibly removed from a usufruct system with the sugar plantation landowners that had been in use for generations.

In my literary research, I have discovered cross-cultural parallels in spirituality as it relates to writers and writing. One example can be found in Martin Heidegger’s “Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry” where he states:

“Thus the essence of poetry is joined to the laws which strive to separate and unite the hints of the gods and the voice of the people. The poet himself stands between the former—the gods—and the latter—the people. He is the one who has been cast out—out into that *between*, between gods and men. But first and only in this between is it decided who man is and where his existence is settled” (Heidegger 64).

This echoes Anzaldúa’s contention for the role of the *nepantlera* who exists in the realm of *nepantla*, the Náhuatl word meaning “in the middle of it” or “middle.” *Henosis*, which is the

Greek word for divine work, is a process of creating art in service of a higher calling, a greater consciousness. This concept of divine work through the creation of art (i.e. the Roman version called *Magnum Opus*) I researched during my undergraduate work and realized its connection to spirituality and creativity. Originally developed through the Neoplatonic philosophies of Iamblicus, Plotinus, and Porphyry, the spiritual practice of Henosis ultimately allows the writer or poet to become one with a greater consciousness (Basile).

Another source that speaks to my writing and this thesis comes from an essay written by Marianne Hirsch titled “The Generation of Postmemory.” In essence, postmemory is “a *structure* of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. It is a *consequence* of traumatic recall (unlike post-traumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove” (Hirsch 3). The individual (writer, artist, or poet) receives the familial/cultural generational trauma experienced from past generations. She also states that “Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up” (Hirsch 106). Her very significant contention points to the idea that:

“Postmemorial work...strives to *reactivate* and *reembody* more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression. Thus less-directly affected participants can become engaged in the generation of postmemory, which can persist even after all participants and even their familial descendants are gone” (Hirsch 111).

Even though we may be multiple generations removed from our cultural, social, or national structures that are part of our significant ancestral foundations, we still can be affected by them

on an experiential level. We can tap into that *postmemory* and write with a similar level of authority and knowledge. Additionally, Hirsch questions if these traumatic historical events are any less significant for their adoption by those who are many generations removed. She believes there is an equal desire to know and understand these legacies of experiences shared by our ancestors (Hirsch 114).

Since I (and my writing) am so far removed from the experiences of the past Puerto Rican cultural, familial, historical, and traumatic events including the near-genocide of the Taino indigenous people, I still can be affected and re-experience them through trans-generational postmemory. In fact, I argue that I am able to view and re-live these experiences through fresh eyes. Thus, I created poems that might reflect these internally re-activated events to greater and more impactful depths. I've written pieces that I hope might accomplish innovative in-roads with a significant appreciation and thoughtful awareness for Puerto Rico's turbulent foundational stories and experiences. Before learning of Hirsch's essay on postmemory, I visited Puerto Rico both in March of 2011 and in May of 2012. Both times I felt an elemental connection to the island of my ancestors and to *mi gente de Puerto Rico*. However, there was a hard barrier that separated me from them: the language. As a child, I was instructed by my parents that we should only speak English. They mistakenly believed they were trying to help us since the dominant cultural convention was that anyone who spoke any language other than English would be ostracized, ridiculed, or discriminated against, to say the least. This practice of dissuading Latino/Latina children from speaking the language of their family heritage is felt to this day and, "The result is that now we are in 2021, there are generations of Latinos/Latinas that don't speak Spanish as a result of this deep language suppression," Dr. (Jerry B.) Gonzalez (Director of the University of Texas at San Antonio's Mexico Center and an Associate Professor of History)

said” (Castoreno and Castillo). Even with such an enormous barrier that is language, I was still able to soak in and embrace the multicultural, folkloric, and historic island that is Puerto Rico. Of the cities, towns, and locations that inspired me the most, Cabo Rojo Lighthouse and El Yunque Rainforest would have to be the most picturesque places on the island. Playa Sucia, behind Cabo Rojo Lighthouse, holds a deep spiritual connection. That crescent beach calls to me even now and I know it will be where this Nuyorican will eventually be laid to rest.

One aspect of my literary research that proved to be especially daunting was in relation to the first section of my collection. I came up against an enormous lack of authoritative sources when investigating the archaic peoples (Taino/Borike’n) of Puerto Rico. As mentioned earlier, even scant knowledge of Puerto Rico’s indigenous tribes and their history was never addressed nor acknowledged by the US public school system when I was growing up. In many instances, schoolteachers discouraged any such questions I had asked and instead focused on white, patriarchal histories of the US, painting such figures as George Washington, Davey Crocket, and Christopher Columbus as great men that were destined to be forever seared into the fabric of American consciousness. It was only as an adult (and then only in the last 20 years) that I began to actively question the white-centric narrative that is still propagated by the US to this day. As I peeled away layer upon layer of the tragedies inflicted by the US on any other group or people deemed a threat (whether real or imagined), the real stories of the minorities and the original peoples of North, Central, and South America became clear to me. This is best illustrated by a specific source I came across during my research of the Taino stories, culture, and history. The book is titled *Puerto Rican Poetry*, edited and translated by Roberto Márquez. In book one of the collection, Márquez makes a clear and extremely cogent observation, specifically about the

lyrical style called the *areyto*, and in general on the lack of historical knowledge about the Taino indigenous people of Puerto Rico:

“The creation of a people with an oral tradition, the *areyto* would not survive its encounter with the book tradition of the European nations (Columbus and others), who brought holocaust and devastation. Their voice having been stilled or otherwise muted by the cupidity, triumphal clamor, and paternalistic benevolence of their conquerors, the aboriginal population of the island (Puerto Rico) left us no native account or untranslated narratives that relate firsthand the story of their lives and vicissitudes prior to that fateful meeting. There is only the mute witness of their unearthed artifacts, their enduring linguistic legacy, the testimony of their still existing ruins, and the accusation of their bones. Any historical discussion of Puerto Rican poetry must thus begin with recognition and acknowledgement of a hovering and vast ancestral silence” (Márquez 3-4).

And it is that silence I must acknowledge and recognize in this thesis. Archeological sources like *Ancient Borinquen: Archeological and Ethnohistory of Native Puerto Rico* can make educated guesses on what the political, religious, and spiritual practices of the Borike'n/Taino *may* have been like, but ultimately, without a documented testimonial directly from the Taino/Borike'n peoples, we are left with one-sided, usually politically motivated accounts. This is why I highlight and thank Marianne Hirsch's postmemory work. Through her very insightful essay, I can make connections with my ancestral kin's postmemorial traumas and can exert intuitive creative efforts in my poems included in the first section of my collection. From the *hovering and vast ancestral silence*, I've tried to give the Taino/Borike'n a voice, however small, for the present and perhaps future generations of writers, historians, and investigators of justice to further the research and the study of the Borike'n/Taino gente of Puerto Rico.

## Framework

Anzaldúa mentioned an intriguing process in *Light in the Dark* as, “the four stages of the alchemical process (nigredo [blackness or Shadow], albedo [whiteness or anima and animus], citrinitas [yellowness or wise old man or woman archetype], and rubedo [redness or Self archetype which has achieved wholeness])” (Anzaldúa 123). This is further defined by the Centre of Applied Jungian Studies as,

“the process of transmutation of the primal material (prima materia) into the *philosopher’s stone*. The philosopher stone is the most refined and valuable substance which through the alchemical process emerges from the crudest and most worthless. In traditional alchemy, this was the transmutation of lead into gold. Later, in the Gnostic tradition, this was interpreted not as the transmutation of metal, but of the *soul or psyche* of the alchemist himself” (Magnum Opus).

The Centre of Applied Jungian Studies bases the application of this process through Jung’s theory as “having four stages: confession, elucidation, education and transformation. This is an analogue for the four stages of alchemical transmutation: Nigredo, Albedo, Citrinitas and Rubedo” (Magnum Opus). Basically, one must be willing to follow these stages with the ultimate goal of living a more authentic life, one that provides wholeness and fulfillment. For a long time, I was not in touch with my authentic self. Since reading about alchemical transmutation as mentioned by Anzaldúa, I found a starting point in seeking a closer, more authentic connection to my writing self and a higher consciousness. However, I am intrigued by a particular method of attaining this connection through the process of creating a divine work, or Magnum Opus. In the Neoplatonist version of Henosis, the only way

“to get closest to the Monad, (or the) One, each individual must engage in divine work (theurgy) according to Iamblichus of Chalcis. This divine work can be defined as each individual dedicating their lives to making the created world and mankind's relationship to it, and one another, better. This is done by living a virtuous life seeking after one's Magnum Opus” (Henosis).

I first came across the philosophical/spiritual concept of Henosis during my years as an undergraduate student. I felt an instantaneous connection with the idea of reaching oneness with a higher consciousness through a magnum opus. Other religious or spiritual beliefs or methods did not give me that essential and elemental connection with my writing as a vehicle for its attainment. This connection through divine work lends itself to my discovery of my Puerto Rican/Taino culture's own concept of being a bridge between the spiritual realm and mortal realm: the caracaracol.

In the vein of spiritual touchstone experiences, one specific event presented itself as a driving force for my continuing journey as a poet and a writer. In 1999, I had met a shaman at a local Native American/Christian study group called the Celebration Circle in San Antonio, Texas. He had studied with the elders of the Lakota in South Dakota and had learned the deeply spiritual practice of the Sweat Lodge. I had let him know of my obsession for answers to my life's path and that up until then, I had been unsuccessful in finding those answers. He suggested I join him and a small group in the Texas Hill Country for a Sweat Lodge session. Desperate for some answers, I accepted the invitation. He insisted I follow all the ritualistic aspects prior to the ceremony. These aspects included making prayer ties with red cotton cloth--attached by red cotton string, concentrating on what it was I was seeking while making the prayer ties, and fasting for 24 hours prior to the sweat.

The day of the sweat arrived, and I had dutifully finished with the prayer ties. Thanks to the 24 hours of fasting, my stomach was a grumbling monster. Adjacent to the Sweat Lodge, a bonfire burned down to the large stones that had been placed at its base. Each stone was carried into the Sweat Lodge. We all entered the diminutive, dome-shaped structure, one by one, and tried to adjust ourselves to the sauna-like heat inside. It was pitch black except for the soft reddish glow coming from the stones. The small sounds of our movements revealed more or less where we were in our circle. My friend/shaman who acted as the moderator informed us that there was nothing expected from us, that we all had our reasons for being there, and that each of us was welcome to reveal those reasons if we chose to do so. A person next to me started speaking and a television appeared right in my face. My immediate reaction was anger. I thought some idiot decided to bring a mini-tv into the sweat. I looked around to see if anyone else saw what I was witnessing, but I didn't hear anyone else complain about it. I took a long look at the "television" and realized my body was humming. I felt a connection to what was in front of my eyes, the people around me, the land I was sitting on, the sweat lodge, and everything else, EVERYthing else.

The vision, as I now know it to be, felt like a direct, impossibly long live wire stretching from the top of my head to the cosmos (the source, Monad, etc.). It showed me the world, in its pure splendor, torn into two halves by a *white* pen. The pen had concentric circles on each tip. *Black* rings on the inside, *yellow* rings in the middle, and *red* rings on the outside (Nigredo, Albedo, Citrinitas, and Rubedo). Then the vision disappeared. I came back to myself, both horrified and ecstatic beyond reason. My body was shaking and humming as if I'd consumed enough coffee that could fill an oil tanker. I heard the moderator call out my name (he later said he had called my name a few times) and I let everyone in the Sweat Lodge know that while they

had been telling their stories and reasons for attending the sweat, I had just had a vision. The moderator quietly suggested I depart the Lodge and to think about what the meaning of the vision might be for me. I left the sweat and it took a considerable amount of time to sit and recover from my vision. It was several years afterward that I was able to conclude that the Cosmos, Powers-That-Be, Atabéy Herself were all pointing out what I had already known on a primal level: I am on the path of the writer, the poet, and I'm inspired by the concept of poets, writers, shaman, priests, and artists also being known as caracaracols (Keegan). But more than that, I endeavor to be the *pen* in my vision, the bridge between the one world made into two halves, these two halves consisting of the celestial realm and the mortal realm. I am thrilled to be able to realize what is for me a monumental conclusion. It drives me to do something meaningful about it. Specifically, I hope to teach and share the gift that is writing with others at every opportunity.

Speaking of the caracaracol, I discovered in my additional research of my Puerto Rican/Taino/Boriké'n heritage the mythological origin story of Deminan, the first caracaracol. The caracaracol, or cursed creator, is the person who exists between the celestial realm (where the gods and goddesses reside) and the earthly realm, where mortals exist (Keegan). Like Heidegger's poet's poet and Anzaldúa's *nepantlera*, it is the caracaracol's (artist, shaman, priest) job to be the conduit between the spiritual and the mortal worlds. Different cultures spanning multiple geographical locations from many time periods have come to similar conclusions: the poet, the artist, the shaman, and writer all exist in the in-between and as such provide the necessary link or bridge between the celestial and the material worlds. This provides an enormous source of inspiration in my writing both with this thesis and my work in general.

For purposes of assimilation - my generation (and immediate relatives) were instructed to focus on American cultural rules, (white patriarchal) histories, and language. As a result of my innate desire for spiritual connections in my later years, I was naturally drawn to or sought out far flung cultures, philosophies, and spiritualities (Greek, Neoplatonist, Henosis, Native American, and Jungian archetypes). Due to an extreme lack of US educational knowledge, I never knew the full breadth of my own ancestral or cultural spirituality and its own version of Henosis (i.e. Deminan and the way of the caracaracol). This is not just a book of poetry, it is a book of reawakening, a book of reconnecting to unfamiliar, yet familial roots. It is also a way to restore the power of historical, genetic, and native heritage. It is my methodology of embodying through words, emotions, and divine bridges that which was taken by imperialists, old and new. Finally, it is my way of taking up, once more, the mantle of poet, artist, shaman: the caracaracol. May it always be.

## Works Cited

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera*. 4th ed., San Francisco, Aunt Lute Books, 2012.
- . *Light in the Dark: = Luz En Lo Oscuro : Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*. Edited by AnaLouise Keating, Kindle ed., Durham, Duke UP, 2015.
- Bosque Pérez, Ramón, and José Javier Colón Morera, editors. *Puerto Rico under Colonial Rule: Political Persecution and the Quest for Human Rights*. Albany, State U of New York P, 2006.
- Castoreno, Audrey, and Alex Castillo. "'Stolen from Us': The Latinos Who Lost Their Language and the Fight to Recover It." *kens5.com*, [www.kens5.com/article/news/community/together-we-rise/latino-lost-their-language/273-8a76446e-36ba-4233-8aab-c3fe06aa77aa?tag1=kensshare&fbclid=IwAR3xmjwfd0He3oAc73w208HZhN2iM8YBQhQqlmNztWQ4OP0t-HxJkwrXOB4](http://www.kens5.com/article/news/community/together-we-rise/latino-lost-their-language/273-8a76446e-36ba-4233-8aab-c3fe06aa77aa?tag1=kensshare&fbclid=IwAR3xmjwfd0He3oAc73w208HZhN2iM8YBQhQqlmNztWQ4OP0t-HxJkwrXOB4). Accessed 21 Aug. 2021.
- Espada, Martín. *The Lover of a Subversive Is Also a Subversive: Essays and Commentaries*. Ann Arbor, U of Michigan P, 2010.
- "Henosis." *Psychology Wiki*, Wikia.Org, [psychology.wikia.org/wiki/Henosis#Divine\\_Work](http://psychology.wikia.org/wiki/Henosis#Divine_Work). Accessed 11 Sept. 2021.
- Hirsch, Marianne. "The Generation of Postmemory." *Poetics Today*, vol. 29, no. 1, Spring 2008, pp. 103-28, [read.dukeupress.edu/poetics-today/article/29/1/103/20954/The-Generation-of-Postmemory](http://read.dukeupress.edu/poetics-today/article/29/1/103/20954/The-Generation-of-Postmemory). Accessed 25 Apr. 2021.

Keegan, Bill. "The Taino Myth of the Cursed Creator." *Ted Ed*,

[www.ted.com/talks/bill\\_keegan\\_the\\_taino\\_myth\\_of\\_the\\_cursed\\_creator?language=en#t-203588](http://www.ted.com/talks/bill_keegan_the_taino_myth_of_the_cursed_creator?language=en#t-203588). Accessed 2019.

"Magnum Opus." *Centre for Applied Jungian Studies*, [appliedjung.com/the-magnum-opus/](http://appliedjung.com/the-magnum-opus/).

Accessed 11 Sept. 2021.

Márquez, Robert, editor. *Puerto Rican Poetry: A Selection from Aboriginal to Contemporary*

*Times*. Amherst, U of Massachusetts P, 2007.

Plascencia, Salvador. *The People of Paper*. Orlando, Harcourt, 2006.

"Understanding Gonzo Journalism: From Thompson to Wolfe." *Masterclass*, 8 Nov. 2020,

[www.masterclass.com/articles/understanding-gonzo-journalism#what-is-gonzo-journalism](http://www.masterclass.com/articles/understanding-gonzo-journalism#what-is-gonzo-journalism). Accessed 30 Sept. 2021.

## Bibliography

- Acosta-Belen, Edna. "Judith Ortiz Cofer (1952-2016)." *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, 12 Sept. 2003, [www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/judith-ortiz-cofer-1952-2016](http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/judith-ortiz-cofer-1952-2016). Accessed Feb. 2021.
- Albizu, Ingmar. "Five Art and Life Lessons from Francisco Oller." *Speculative Tertulia*, Ingmar Albizu, 4 Sept. 2020, [ingmaralbizu.com/five-art-and-life-lessons-from-francisco-oller/](http://ingmaralbizu.com/five-art-and-life-lessons-from-francisco-oller/). Accessed 20 Aug. 2021.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera*. 4th ed., San Francisco, Aunt Lute Books, 2012.
- . *Light in the Dark: = Luz En Lo Oscuro : Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*. Edited by AnaLouise Keating, Kindle ed., Durham, Duke UP, 2015.
- Bosque Pérez, Ramón, and José Javier Colón Morera, editors. *Puerto Rico under Colonial Rule: Political Persecution and the Quest for Human Rights*. Albany, State U of New York P, 2006.
- Burgos, Julia De. *Song of the Simple Truth: Obra Completa Poetica : the Complete Poems*. Translated by Jack Agüeros, Willimantic, Curbstone Press, 2008.
- Chaar-Pérez, Kahlil. "'A Revolution of Love': Ramón Emeterio Betances, Anténor Firmin, and Affective Communities in the Caribbean." *The Global South*, vol. 7, no. 2, fall 2013, pp. 11-36, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/globalsouth.7.2.11](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/globalsouth.7.2.11). Accessed 28 Aug. 2021.
- Castoreno, Audrey, and Alex Castillo. "'Stolen from Us': The Latinos Who Lost Their Language and the Fight to Recover It." *kens5.com*, [www.kens5.com/article/news/community/together-we-rise/latino-lost-their-language/273-8a76446e-36ba-4233-8aab-](http://www.kens5.com/article/news/community/together-we-rise/latino-lost-their-language/273-8a76446e-36ba-4233-8aab-)

c3fe06aa77aa?tag1=kensshare&fbclid=IwAR3xmjwfd0He3oAc73w208HZhN2iM8YBQ  
hqQlmNztWQ4OPot-HxJkwrXOB4. Accessed 21 Aug. 2021.

Espada, Martín. *The Lover of a Subversive Is Also a Subversive: Essays and Commentaries*. Ann Arbor, U of Michigan P, 2010.

Galeano, Eduardo. *The Book of Embraces*. Translated by Cedric Belfrage and Mark Schafer, New York, W.W. Norton, 1992.

"Henosis." *Psychology Wiki*, Wikia.Org, [psychology.wikia.org/wiki/Henosis#Divine\\_Work](http://psychology.wikia.org/wiki/Henosis#Divine_Work). Accessed 11 Sept. 2021.

Hirsch, Marianne. "The Generation of Postmemory." *Poetics Today*, vol. 29, no. 1, Spring 2008, pp. 103-28, [read.dukeupress.edu/poetics-today/article/29/1/103/20954/The-Generation-of-Postmemory](http://read.dukeupress.edu/poetics-today/article/29/1/103/20954/The-Generation-of-Postmemory). Accessed 25 Apr. 2021.

Keegan, Bill. "The Taino Myth of the Cursed Creator." *Ted Ed*, [www.ted.com/talks/bill\\_keegan\\_the\\_taino\\_myth\\_of\\_the\\_cursed\\_creator?language=en#t-203588](http://www.ted.com/talks/bill_keegan_the_taino_myth_of_the_cursed_creator?language=en#t-203588). Accessed 2019.

Leonard, Thomas M., and J. Michael Francis, editors. *Encyclopedia of Latin America*. Vol. 1, New York City, Facts On File, 2010. 4 vols.

"Magnum Opus." *Centre for Applied Jungian Studies*, [appliedjung.com/the-magnum-opus/](http://appliedjung.com/the-magnum-opus/). Accessed 11 Sept. 2021.

Márquez, Gabriel García. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. New York, HarperPerennial, 1998.

Márquez, Robert, editor. *Puerto Rican Poetry: A Selection from Aboriginal to Contemporary Times*. Amherst, U of Massachusetts P, 2007.

Plascencia, Salvador. *The People of Paper*. Orlando, Harcourt, 2006.

- Rivera, Magaly. "Taino Indian Culture." *Welcome to Puerto Rico*,  
welcome.topuertorico.org/reference/taino.shtml?fbclid=IwAR34IO7ZbaaDIN2wFelTjoL  
hbOXhV3mPOB506ZCFaQUDYPAoq\_Q8K5VbStg. Accessed Feb. 2021.
- "El Antillano." , directed by Tito Román Rivera. , produced by Tito Román Rivera, and Caserio  
Films. , Caserio Films, 2015. Alexander Street,  
<https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/el-antillano>.
- Rodriguez Alvarez, Angel, editor. *Boriquén: Breve Historia de los Indios de Puerto  
Rico*. eBook, Editorial Nuevo Mundo, 2010.
- Roe, Peter G., et al. *Ancient Borinquen: Archaeology and Ethnohistory of Native Puerto Rico*.  
Edited by Peter E. Siegel, e-book ed., Alabama, U of Alabama P, 2005. Kindle.
- Santiago, Esmeralda. *When I Was Puerto Rican: [a Memoir]*. Cambridge, Da Capo Press, 2006.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston,  
Beacon Press, 2015.
- Turner, Faythe, editor. *Puerto Rican Writers at Home in the USA: An Anthology*. Nachdr. ed.,  
Seattle, Open Hand Publ., [19]98.
- "Understanding Gonzo Journalism: From Thompson to Wolfe." *Masterclass*, 8 Nov. 2020,  
[www.masterclass.com/articles/understanding-gonzo-journalism#what-is-gonzo-  
journalism](http://www.masterclass.com/articles/understanding-gonzo-journalism#what-is-gonzo-journalism). Accessed 30 Sept. 2021.
- Van Middeldyk, Rudolph Adams. *The History of Puerto Rico from the Spanish Discovery to the  
American Occupation*. E-book ed., Hamburg, Tredition, 2011.
- Zinn, Howard. *A People's History of the United States: 1492-present*. 3rd ed., Milton Park,  
Routledge, 2013.

ROOTING FOR SPICES

by

ROD CARLOS RODRIGUEZ



## Rooting for Spices

Caciques live  
in my heartbeat,  
swim in my corpuscles,  
drown in my brown skin,  
and are reborn  
in my voice.

Their rushing rivers  
part my curls,  
pour through my  
open iris  
at 3am,  
filter my vision  
in mimosa leaves, golden sunsets,  
Utua mountains,  
and the Adjuntas pueblo.

Taino paint my breath  
in tongues  
murmured down to  
my toes, my hands,  
the edges of my criollo.  
Mi gente de  
Mayagüez, Bayamon,  
and Cabo Rojo  
keep feeding, caressing  
these roots  
fatigued by  
a half millennium  
fighting güeros, Spanish Crowns,  
and the Caribe.

I hear el piratas  
whispering through  
taste buds  
embracing oregano,  
cilantro, Sazón  
and the body follows,  
joins, leads me deep  
into El Yunque's forest,  
by diamond emerald  
shores,  
of Borike'n,  
of home.

## Xabao and the Cemi

It was the cemi's fault,  
jumped  
in her path,  
shaped as obsidian  
stone.

Being mere naborías, she knew  
only  
an elite nitaíno  
or behique could  
make sense of  
it.

Jurakán's fast winds and gusts  
paled  
in speed and  
agility to Xabao's  
flight

across plateau, through forest, over  
rocky  
paths, she slid  
into the village  
behique's

ceremonial guaíza mask. Panting, head  
lowered  
in respect, Xabao  
retold her run  
in

with the obsidian cemi. Xiorro  
was  
meditating on the  
village *areyto's* cohoba  
laced

ceremony. He had little time  
for  
cemi, obsidian or  
not. Too often  
cemi

spirits were departed once Xiorro

arrived.  
Xabao stood, staring  
at her behique's  
bare

and age-cracked feet. Soft  
wind  
streamed into their  
silence. Xiorro relented,  
spit

cohoba into the dirt, grabbed  
his  
daughter's hand and  
ran to the  
beach.

Xabao stopped. Knelt by obsidian  
cemi,  
Xiorro's eyes widened,  
the spiritual force  
of

the cemi pummeled his senses,  
withered  
any doubts, reverently  
picked up his  
daughter's

cemi, it spoke its dark  
language  
in his mind.  
Presented its desired  
shape

behind Xiorro's eyes, he cried  
out,  
fell to his knees,  
Xabao knelt beside  
him.

Held her father's shoulders, cemi's  
dark  
vision invaded her  
mind as well.

Arrowhead,  
for a would-be god named  
Cristóbal de Sotomayor.

Xabao and Xiorro, terrified, prayed  
cemi  
might release them  
from this heinous  
path.

It brooked no denial.  
Jauca  
river would receive  
the Spaniard's blood.  
Aguëbana II,

cacique to half of Borike,  
would  
commit the killing  
shot. Xabao shook  
her

head, her father cried and  
forged  
the obsidian arrowhead,  
consigned to Borike's  
doom.

## Gente in Silence

What came before  
Isabella-sanctioned genocide,

What came after  
Atabey-lost to winds and

time.

No *areyto*.  
Voices still.

Only artifact.

A smattering  
of language.

What comes next  
in shadows of

caciques and  
postmemory.

Remember us.

Remember.

## Salomé Waits

Beside Abacoa's river,  
beneath Aruaca's  
Cueva Ventana, she

caresses tobacco leaves,  
gently presses them  
between thumb and index finger.

Waits. As days, weeks,  
decades coat the trail  
back to his cave.

His promised kiss  
remains moist on  
her cohoba-laced lips.

Waits. Hours, months,  
lifetimes season her belief  
in Aruaca's return.

Even Yocahú rests  
His hands on Salomé's  
pale shoulders, whispers *patience*.

Waits. As coqui's cries serenade  
behind last night's downpour.  
Still angry at Don Julian's

rejection of Aruaca,  
Salomé remains  
unaware her lover

died at her father's  
feet. She remains seated,  
every night in Cueva Ventana.

Waits.

## Creator's Curse

I

Scabs across my back,  
chest, sores that  
never heal. My brothers  
suffer no affliction,  
skin smooth  
and honey brown,  
true Gods in  
our Celestial  
lands of plenty.

Yaya's bohio  
had many treasures,  
I knew it was  
forbidden.  
My brothers cared  
little.  
I saw them  
enter the bohio,  
followed only  
to scold them.

They wrestled for  
the gourd hanging  
from the ceiling,  
I tried to catch it  
as it fell,  
burst on the floor,  
an entire ocean  
carried us away  
from all we understood,  
a new ocean world  
of islands, rivers, and caves.

Still I  
heard whispers of  
our old home.  
My brothers  
thought I was mad,  
they heard silence.  
Separated, we explored  
this water world,  
sometimes my scabs

kept me weak.  
But soon  
I found a bohio,  
Much like Yaya's.

My brothers were  
there, waiting,  
with an elder.  
He said he was  
our grandfather.  
Bayamanacoa  
extolled tales  
of our lost mother,  
Itibi Cahubaba,  
over a meal of cassava.  
We were grateful  
for this knowledge.

## II

Bayamanacoa kept staring  
at my scabs and sores.  
He inhaled  
sacred medicine  
through his nostril,  
then flicked his nose,  
potion flashed  
on my back,  
lightning pain  
across my body,  
arms spasmed,  
vomit spewed  
from mouth to floor.

My brothers, scared  
at the sight, held  
me, saw my back  
swell, they flinched.  
I felt the skin tighten,  
expand, pain made  
me cry out,  
one of my brothers,  
ax in hand,  
cut me,  
just between the  
shoulder blades.

A beautiful sea turtle  
emerged, crawled to  
water's edge, swam and  
populated our new world,  
and I slept...many days.

Upon waking,  
I still hear my  
Celestial family,  
glimpse their forms  
sometimes at sunset,  
sunrise. I am both  
cursed and blessed.  
These gifts will pass  
to those who follow  
in my steps.  
I am Deminan,  
a caracaracol.

## Hummingbird Blues

A pool of pure sky.  
It's sapphire glow  
lit Alida and Taroo's  
faces,

she knew it was  
wrong,  
she knew  
his touch burned.

Her father,  
spittle rage-filled,  
pushed her  
into another's arms.

A coward's arms,  
killing in thought  
and action of  
Taroo's tribe.

Her lover knew  
her heart could  
never beat to please  
only her tribe.

She begged Atabey,  
Yocahú, to save  
her from her father,  
this fate.

Her arms, her legs,  
Flattened into red petals,  
her eyes, her mouth  
formed into stamens.

Taroo sits at their  
pool, days, weeks,  
cries and begs Atabey,  
craves Alida's sweet fragrance.

His lips become  
a needle-shaped beak,  
arms form into

tiny wings,

he scents Alida's  
bloom close to  
the pool's edge,  
flies to her flower,

they kiss once  
more and always.

## Deminan and the Sea Turtle

Mother Goddess, Atabey, coaxed her great granddaughter, the sea turtle, onto the luminescent shore. Just 2 days and three nights spent inside Deminan's scabrous and feverish back was all, but the reptile missed the warmth and the darkness, as any child does for the womb. Atabey was wise to the moment's import, named her great granddaughter after the lights that glow at twilight in the beach's small waves: Lumi, short for Luminescence. And she smiled her sea turtle smile, her fins flapping on the wet sand.

Deminan didn't miss Lumi in his back. Who would possibly want a sea turtle lodged in there, pain and agony, then to be cut out by force? Sure, it *was* Lumi's birth that revealed his curse, his blessing--the first shaman, a carcaracol. But who decides to spit ceremonial tobacco on an unsuspecting person making Lumi grow inside Deminan? Grandfather or not, Bayamanacoa should be drowned in those same luminescent waters Lumi was named after. Lumi visits Deminan, occasionally. He feeds her fresh crab or jelly fish. Atabey sees these visits. The Goddess smiles.

## Struggle and Silence

1. The war is long,  
Aracibo hikes  
the hard, mountainous  
trail to his yucayeque,  
near Abacoa's banks.
2. Mabó...
3. Canóbana...
4. Hayuya...
5. Jumacao,  
limping, wounds  
fester in humid  
twilight. No areyto  
for many full moons,  
but he learned  
Spaniards are human.
6. Naguabo...
7. Güaraca...
8. Dagüao
9. In Turabo yucayeque,  
Caguax orders  
the entire village  
put to the knife,  
no slaves for  
white demons,  
like other caciques  
have allowed.
10. Aramaná...

## Columbus Day

Boricu'a saw the ships  
with white cloths  
as clouds, these

ships brought men  
who spoke ugly  
noise, like iguaca.

The ugly,  
upright animals seemed  
as gods, at first.

Some of us lacked  
trust in their  
shiny clothes

and their buticaco eyes.  
They did not  
honor the Bo'jike.

Then the cacique  
tested one of  
these gods, drowned

him. He stayed dead.  
Now, Bohiti warns  
of guazabara

as our bohios burn,  
we make ready  
to fight the evil

leaders they call Columbus,  
Ponce.

Taino Language Key:

Boricu'a - The Valiant People of the Sacred House

iguaca - green parrot

buticaco - shifty eyes

Bo'jike - Great Lord of the Forest and Earth

cacike - Chief

Bohiti - shaman - a Taino spiritual leader

guazabara - war, warrior

bohios - roundhouses

Yahíma

She knew nothing  
of empire, disease,

only warm nights,  
feathers in  
ebony strands  
falling on  
soft, brown shoulders.

She saw little  
beyond her children,

faces painted,  
dancing around fires  
and bohíos.

She knew nothing  
of conquest, greed,

only spirit lights  
at twilight  
trailing her hands  
in luminous waves sliding,  
whispering on beaches  
by her yucayeque.

She saw little  
beyond silence,

her parents murdered,  
invaders weapons

painting blood  
on anyone  
protecting her  
brothers and sisters,  
Boricu'a, herself.

She saw nothing  
the wind will ever reveal

after empire,  
after greed,  
after silence.



## Juan's Fever

Gold: universal currency,  
status, influence in palace,  
trade councils, or Seville.

Growing up in the Kingdom of Leon  
Juan knew  
gold opened doors, consolidated  
property, bought

just about anything anyone  
could ever want or need.  
These islands, these savages  
*must* hide rivers of gold

Cristóbal Colón bragged of,  
mountains of  
precious metal, oceans glittering,  
waiting, tempting.

Juan's avarice--prepared to  
kill, rape, enslave,  
drain any source, human,  
animal, these Taíno surrounding

him, he marries the cacique's  
daughter, ugly  
face painted in indigo colors  
and blood

red tones. Juan grudgingly  
accepts the young woman's  
brown, calloused hand as his  
dreams flash in prized metal,

cold, glinting, in his new  
wife's earlobes, then the fever  
takes Juan's mind. A killing fever,

to consume all thought  
save his yearning to live a long,  
rich life, enjoy all the wealth,  
he *will* kill, rape, enslave--multitudes.

In his gold-tinged hallucinations,

Juan Ponce  
de Leon's captain whispers...a fountain, across  
the waves...

## Cristóbal

All of them,  
or as many as possible,  
must release their aberrant  
lives to his blade.

One never opposed  
Viceroy Colón.

Cristóbal de Mendoza  
salved his conscience  
by labeling them  
cattle, herds to be  
culled, for Spain,

for empire.

His gaze averted  
as each man, woman,  
child is slaughtered,  
whole villages  
silent except for the flies,  
their low hum – rumbles  
in warm sunsets,

for distant crowns.

His sleep measured  
in small sips,  
too many  
blood-rimmed eyes  
stare in silent  
dreams, except for  
the flies,

for gold and slaves.

Vieques, now empty of  
villages, empty of all Taíno.  
They live instead  
in Cristóbal's nightmares.  
Hundreds, thousands.  
Like flies.

Like silence...

## John White's 4<sup>th</sup> Voyage

Raleigh promised.  
A fourth voyage, a Governorship,  
John White wanted  
a fresh start, a  
new Virginia.

The fleet languished  
in 1587,  
an ugly little  
island, some called  
Beake, others  
would name Vieques.

His men were hungry,  
sheep ran wild,  
standing water copious.  
And twilight brought  
witch-lit waves,  
White reflected.

Twilight also brought  
Her, a black-haired  
woman, Her eyes  
witch-lit as the waves,  
an enchantress.  
White asked  
Her name. She answered  
in his mind, *Atabey*.

Gibberish, he thought.  
Then his men  
started dying.  
Was it the wild sheep?  
The standing water?  
Was it Her...  
Atabey?

He and his men bolted  
to their ships...  
he ordered all speed  
to his new Virginia,  
away from  
Beake, cursed islands,  
Vieques,

away from Her.

Maboya and Cofresí

Four hundred souls,  
with my own hands.  
None were Puerto Rican.

Foreign frauds,  
their gold  
and laws and guns.

Two years of taking  
their wealth, lives, ships.  
The Catholics among

my crew pray  
at our brazen, wanton  
violations toward

our imperial masters.  
Prayer is for  
cattle sent to slaughter,

for puertorriqueños deprived  
of what rightfully  
belongs to them, to us,

to me. I have no time  
for unjust gods  
with deaf ears.

I'd just as soon pray  
to the coqui and  
his three toed feet.

Perhaps Yocahú  
might pass my  
treasures to mi gente

when Governor de la Torre  
finally orders  
my execution.

Four hundred lives,  
snuffed out, with  
these two hands.

Maboya and I parleyed,  
out there on the waves,  
a deal the God

swore would save  
many lives, my wife,  
my daughter.

We agreed who  
should die.  
The last one

Maboya will collect  
owns my two hands.  
Viva Puerto Rico.

-Captain Roberto Cofresí y Ramírez de Arellano, *El Pirata Cofresí* killed 300 to 400 people,  
mostly foreigners.

## Diablo of San Cristobal

La garita  
glows in preternatural  
fire, flashes  
and boils the waves  
beating against  
Castillo de San Cristobal,  
cries of missing soldiers  
echo across the hemorrhaging  
bay and fade  
in its depths.  
Manuel, sick  
to his stomach,  
stands in the small  
courtyard.

His turn to man  
Garita del Diablo.  
Mamá convinced  
him to join  
the Imperialist army.  
She needed money  
for comida y café.  
He loves his Mamá.  
More cries drift  
in from the waves.  
Manuel's feet  
are sealed into  
the flagstones,  
his body, a cold  
statue, waves  
spraying his  
granite countenance.

Barking from his  
commanding officer,  
safe and dry near  
the castle walls  
above, reanimates  
Manuel, briefly.  
Walks toward  
the sentry box,  
enters,  
screams.

Guabancex, Her divine  
anger satiated, picks  
Her teeth with  
Manuel's splintered  
femur bone,  
waits in Bahia  
de San Juan.

Manuel's Mamá  
still hears his cries  
across the bay.

## Campeche and the God of Storms

The commission from  
the Spanish Crown  
astonished José.

His reputation's reach  
stunned even him  
at times.

As always,  
he collected  
brushes and

paints from his  
closet before  
the knock

on his front door,  
terrified when lightning  
thunderously struck

at the same time, rain  
started falling suddenly  
on the roof.

The front door  
opened, red eyes  
bore into

Campeche's retinas, screeching  
wind poured into  
the house.

Grudgingly, he  
allowed Jurakán into  
his home.

Other paintings, completed  
or not, were tossed about  
the foyer,

José's 58-year-old  
patience was at  
an end.

He scowled at  
the God of Storms and Lightning,  
shushing Him.

Jurakán sat,  
mortification resplendent across  
His face.

Campeche quickly  
grabbed rum and his sketch pad,  
offered the drink

to his guest, waited.  
Jurakán's screech  
was stifled as

Campeche raised one  
finger in  
the air.

*Quietly*, said the host.  
A small wind spilled  
from divine

lips, *paint me*,  
the wind said.  
José's shocked

face flickered  
briefly, calculating proper  
angles and

dimensions of such  
an amorphous figure,  
this Jurakán.

José knew this  
would be his most  
glorious undertaking,

his fame would be  
celebrated from Spain to the  
Far East!

Even from the start,  
painting Jurakán was

near impossible,

small cracks in the God's  
smokey, churning skin  
caused little bolts

of lightning to strike  
walls, ceiling,  
furniture, which caught

fire. Campeche was  
forced to stop his work  
just to

smother small flames or  
clean up rain puddles  
gathering in

his studio,  
tiny downpours also  
smeared his

paints every moment  
he raised his paintbrush.  
Campeche glared

at Jurakán, the artist's own  
anger mounting, becoming  
the embodiment

of his subject.  
Finally, Campeche roared,  
*Stop fidgeting!*

Instantly, rains ceased,  
lightning--a ripple  
of soft

glow in the background,  
Campeche was able to  
make progress

on his growing masterpiece.  
A Madonna and Child, a San Juan Nepomuceno;  
child's play

to this unruly,  
uncontrollable icon of  
the hurricane God's

image, taking  
shape, Campeche's hand,  
a blur

of activity and speed  
the artist  
never imaged

possible. Bent over,  
Campeche gently mixed final  
colors on

his palette, itself  
a testament to the destruction  
of Jurakán, Himself,

José Campeche y Jordán  
leaned in, ready  
to apply

the last brush stroke of  
his master work  
encompassing techniques

never to be fully embraced  
for hundreds of years,  
Jurakán briefly

glimpsed the portrait,  
anger and rage  
exploded in

the little studio.  
José never had a chance.  
All belongings,

paints, palettes, his other artwork,  
finished or not, burned or  
splintered into

a million, billion pieces,  
then doused in a deluge,

spilling into

the street until neighbors  
ran out of their  
quiet homes,

frightened as Jurakán  
screamed and ran  
out of

José's now leveled  
home. The God  
kept screaming,

churning, raging,  
leveling everything. None  
were spared.

In time,  
The God of Storms and Lightning moved on.  
José's body,

discovered under the shattered  
wreck of his house, was  
still grasping

a small, torn corner  
of his painting, a masterpiece  
of El Jurakán.

Arroyo de Atabey

She spills  
through building construction  
and good intentions,  
fills caracaracol pockets  
with her waters,

sluices over  
prescribed channels,  
past crumbling monuments,  
bubbles beneath lucid streams.

She drenches  
pages and streets,  
flooding words  
through eyes,  
over hearts.

She drives  
under rain-slicked bridges,  
a living river,  
this arroyo de Atabey.

Jacinto, *Dame la Vaca*

Waves against rocks,  
soft thunder  
inside and beside  
diamond-shaped void.

A fortnight, a month, half a year,  
Jacinto and his cows visit  
the beach, crystal blue  
against the froth of white.  
They never tire of

its solace, spray  
of mermaid tears  
blesses these treks.

Reina, vaca favorita,  
kept her close, the rope  
around both their waists,  
an umbilical braided and taut,

a tightrope, an anchor, a safeguard?  
Jacinto heard the raucous  
boom of the wave, Reina's  
screech, the back breaking  
tug towards the well.

Jacinto yelled, Reina ran  
faster, into the opening,  
into churning, tumbling,  
fading light, here by

Paseo Lineal Isabela,  
here at Jacinto's Well.

Francisco, Betances, Spanish Crowns, and the Devil  
after "El Velorio (The Wake)" by Francisco Oller

"They should all  
look away, except  
the old man, foreground,  
mourns and weeps

a still born, every other eye  
turned anywhere...except  
on the child's stillness,"

Oller decides. Mixes the oils,  
drags the chair closer,  
fights the seat cushions  
for comfort. He paints

these Wake-attending  
puertorriqueños,  
inert and silent in their  
morally offensive  
celebrations.

But the old man,  
reminiscent of Betances,  
grieves the child  
of a nation, left  
to the devil's  
jackals, ready to tear,  
rend soft flesh and bone.

Betances' anguish  
seeps from the  
painting's oil, drips  
and pools on every  
gallery floor, every priest's  
nave, every governor's marble  
steps, stains diamond-encrusted

Spanish brows that never  
wash clean.

Oller lays his brush  
on his palette,  
walks away.



## Julia De Burgos and Jurakán

Summers by the river's shore invite healing words in Julia's journal. Atabey whispers poems in Julia's ear of futures painted in poetry and sacrifice. She wakes to see a beautiful woman resting beside her, long dark hair flows around Her shoulders. *Hola, Abuela*. Julia commiserates the usual gestures of respect. Atabey exhales a small, slow smile. ***Jurakán approaches***. The Goddess' words tickle, fill Julia's head. *Again, but He was here two weeks ago*. She hates Guabancex's son. Always angry and filled with killing winds. Julia, more respectful gestures given to the Goddess, walks to the river's edge. Gently splashes cool water on her face. ***Warn mi gente, mi'ja***. Atabey is determined and testy today. *Of course, Abuela*. Julia gathers her journal and blanket, runs home as the clouds gather in rage and lightning.

Of her surviving brothers and sisters, only two believe Julia's warnings. Her parents are tired of Atabey's attachment to their oldest child. However, they know not to irritate the Goddess. *Gather your things, mi'jos! We have to run to the shelter, rapido!* Julia sees Atabey arguing with Jurakán by the neighbor's house. She and her family are running down the street, Jurakán's eyes glowing at them, His lightning, winds, and screams chase them toward the shelter in the village center. Just as they slam the heavy door closed, Julia briefly glimpses the wall of wind flattening houses and tossing cars. ***Julia***. Atabey appears beside Julia, her parents scream in surprise. ***My grandson will spare everyone if you will talk to him***. The Goddess' eyes are clear and shine in the shelter's low lighting. Julia kisses her parents' faces. *No Julia, Jurakán will take you from us!* Hugs her sisters and brothers. Quickly opens the door. It takes all her strength to close it.

Jurakán is screaming at Julia's back. She struggles to turn and face the God of thunder, wind, and lightning. Stares deep in His flashing eyes. Never wavers. *Enough, Jurakán!* Buffeting winds tearing at her body begin to slow. The stinging rain, crackling thunder, and lightning gently subside. Jurakán averts His gaze. Nods His head and walks over to the still standing Los Hijos de Borinquen bar. Grabs a beer. He begins arguing politics with Pedro Albízu Campos. Julia turns back, opens the door to the shelter. She and her family walk down the tree and bougainvillea littered road to rebuild what's left of their home. Julia's journal is right where she left it, Atabey still whispering in her ear.

## Flora, Caciques, and Deminan

A small lookout post,  
with red-orange stones,  
built by Americanos,  
invaders with no respect  
of culture and tradition.  
Flora looks out  
from the lookout's precipice,  
her eyes flash to  
the bay of Guánica,  
settles on its splendor  
fanning from  
jagged hills to aquamarine  
waves. First, Agüeybaná  
then his brother, Güeybaná,  
appear on either side.  
Both caciques whisper in  
a language Flora  
doesn't understand,  
one or two words float  
as familiar resonance.  
Her attention freezes  
on Deminan's name.  
Her adoptive family  
had warned Flora  
to never have  
a child of visions:  
a caracaracol.  
Beside her,  
Agüeybaná speaks  
and Flora finally understands  
his Borike'n words,

*he will be born,  
a child of the sun,  
your grandson.*

Flora flees down  
El Fuerte Caprón's steps,  
races down the rocky path  
in her chanclas,  
twice almost  
twisting her ankle,  
until she runs into the street.  
She doesn't stop until

the doors of  
San Antonio Abad Parraquia  
loom above her.  
Flora kneels on  
the steps of  
Guánica's famous church,  
prays and gulps breaths,  
fear and anxiety twitching  
her eyes, her mouth,  
continues begging  
her Jesus for salvation,  
pleads to be saved  
from having a  
caracaracol nieto.  
Someone shakes Flora,  
startled, wakes,  
stares in confusion  
at the priest,  
the church entrance,  
her knees aching from  
kneeling on  
stone steps.  
Father Rodriguez speaks  
in a language  
she doesn't understand,  
Agüeybaná's words  
still echoing in  
her head. The  
cacique's portents  
finally stop, and Flora  
understands the priest's  
words:

*be not afraid,  
my child,  
your grandson  
will lift up  
many with his songs.*

He gently guides  
her into the church,  
blesses her forehead  
and joyfully praises  
Flora's fortunate tidings,  
a Deminan offspring  
joining her family, soon.

## Luis and Flora

A family calling.  
Luis' father gave him  
little choice.

A long line,  
Rodriguez's of the  
Lutheran cloth.

But his love  
for Flora  
echoed in

blood vessels  
swimming in  
his left and right

ventricles, in the  
recessed membranes  
of the amygdala,

in the Taino-  
spark centered  
between his eyes.

Flora begged him  
to stop loving  
her.

She remembered  
the Caciques and  
their vision.

Luis would never  
stomach a caracacol  
in the holy lineage,

she could never  
ruin this man  
whose love

eclipsed her sight,  
her fears,  
her breath.

Flora revealed her  
vision the afternoon  
he decided

to kneel at  
her feet, beg  
her to be

his bride in  
sight of God,  
Jesus, and the angels.

A glimmer of  
fear clouded Luis'  
hazel eyes.

His arm remained  
raised, refocused  
his gaze on Flora's

deeply tanned face,  
determined to purge  
any such curse

of a caracaracol  
from his offspring,  
while Flora,

doubt hidden behind  
her cherub face,  
accepted Luis' proposal.

## Xiorro and the Sun

Lost between  
Bayamón roads  
named Calle Angelina,  
Calle 37,  
once fields and  
farms Xiorro worked  
and bled, tilling  
master's crops  
before whispers  
of freedom  
for him, for his  
brothers and sisters  
in chains.

Now strange homes,  
on strange streets  
he drifts  
as fog  
rolling through  
windows, gates,  
front doors,  
in Diana Resto's room,  
her ears glisten  
in Xiorro's whispers,  
his anguish  
settles in Diana's  
pores, her blood,  
a grief diffused  
into DNA,  
expelled through  
Diana's children,  
first Evelyn,  
then Chinki,  
Evelyn's Sheila,

onward to the  
blond boy, sitting on  
a hill, staring  
at the sun, smiling,  
Xiorro glinting in  
this child's hazel eyes,  
smiling in anguish,  
moving in visions,  
passed from abuela,

mama, niña,  
to survive the monsters,  
give Xiorro  
and all who  
ache release from  
our prison,

to breathe,  
to feel,  
to heal,  
to see  
what  
can be, should be,  
will be

if only  
to set Xiorro free.

## Bodega Lights

Don Pedro counts the change,  
eighteen dollars and ninety-eight cents,  
gently lands the coins  
in Elizam Escobar's  
callused, paint-smearred hands.  
Revolution red  
bright on his right pinky.

In the corner, by the rack  
of notebooks and ASPIRA  
literary primers,  
Oscar Jose Lopez avoids  
thoughts like sedition,  
conspiracy, but mulls over letters  
like F and A, L and N.

Dylcia Pagán quickly  
enters la Bodega, her mind  
on the next cause that  
MENDs her activism with  
commitments towards country,  
the people, struggle,  
and independentista of soul.

Lolita Lebrón stands atop  
the boxes of White Castle burgers,  
screaming at shoppers,  
her luger and voice drowned out  
by the slurpy machine,  
dripping on the feculent tiles  
dingy with stars and stripes.

Holding Lolita's ankles,  
Rafael Cancel Miranda  
And Irvin Flores Rodríguez  
glare at other customers,  
chins out, even as  
Andres Figueroa Cordero  
waves a tattered, Puerto Rican flag.

Behind the counter,  
Pedro Albizu Campos stops  
counting change and fires  
up the gathered nacionales,

a radioactive halo  
surrounds him in holy  
testament to martyrs  
of Isla Del Encanto.

## Lares de Oro

Mariana knits  
in patches of blues and reds,  
threads needles

through Betances' cry  
for Lares, Utuado,  
Adjuntas, and a Madrid

in flames.

Brazo de Oro  
sews as if  
possessed, she

sings in fields  
of sacred sangre  
beside Manuel and Miguel,

el gritos of tears.

A struggle that  
pushes Yauco,  
Rio Piedras, Ponce,

Belvis, Marti, Riojas,  
Campos, Lebrón,  
too many more,  
crying, bleeding, dying

for visions drowned in

treaties and Guánica  
invasions.  
El grito remains

stillborn, cradled  
in blood and bone  
del Antillano

y Lares de oro.

## A Jibaro's Son

Arrested for a flag.  
A cloth of woven thread and colors bled  
for independendista, for la gente.

Francisco's poor Jibaro papa, on the farm,  
what would he say?  
How would he see his son, sentenced

by oppressors and their dogs,  
policia who worship  
their Americano federales?

In prison, Matos' breakdowns  
herald Atabey's  
presence, solitary cell

blinded by Her radiance.  
She begs him,  
*No cantes a lo locura.*

But still, he sings,  
still he breathes dark  
fugues in spasms

wrapped around a flag,  
a few threads colored  
in familia, la gente,

para Puerto Rico.

## Footnote to a Jibaro's Son

Francisco Matos Paoli,  
a Puerto Rican poet,  
arrested in 1950,  
sentenced to 30 years  
in prison. His *crimes*:

displaying a Puerto Rican  
flag, giving four speeches  
in support of Puerto Rican Independence.

Subsequently, a nervous  
breakdown from prolonged  
periods of solitary confinement  
at La Princesa prison  
in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

After his unconditional pardon,  
he wrote *Canto a la locura*,  
inspired by his experiences  
in prison.

Words, Words, and Cantos

after "Words Words" by Iris M. Zavala,  
translated by Roberto Marquez

Cantos, cantos  
sung to diseased politicians  
with oil-black irises  
shaped in bullion,  
American flags  
draped on  
mustangs crashing  
in Ponce, San Juan,  
it's 2021,  
old sugar factories  
long dead,  
naval kill zones  
in Vieques,  
earthquakes and Jurakán  
crush Humacao,  
Fajardo, and Caguas.  
The drums,  
Covid silent,  
puertorriqueños in misery  
vomit their hate  
of politicians or  
flags,  
streets gigante flooded  
with their regurgitated  
breakfasts and café con leche,  
where la colonia  
seethes and bleeds,  
mas cantos, we beg.  
We sing.  
Sing.

Ponce, Murdered

Such a pretty day, “La Borinqueña” playing in the streets, March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1937. \*

Men in fine suits,  
Women in pretty dresses,

The flags were big and proud and flying for Puerto Rico, for independence.

So many of us  
Marching, smiling.

Ponce, welcoming us and our cause with open arms, we embraced all

our sisters and brothers,  
a shared struggle.

The church bells rang, my brother Miguel fell in the street, blood pouring

from his mouth,  
he was trying

to speak, to breathe, others started falling and running, that’s when I heard

gunfire, smoke,  
screams, my arm,

like fire exploded inside and I ran, holding the gaping wound, crying and yelling,

they chased us,  
la policia, their

rifles pointing at us, people around me dying, running, pleading for them to

stop, please no more—

I stumbled, my leg was bleeding, my hair in my face. I waited, policia ran past,

held my breath,  
closed my eyes

I heard the sobs, the cries of men, women, children. All of them, bleeding,

Miguel, my friends,  
Ponce, sweet Ponce,  
murdered.

\*On March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1937, 21 people were massacred and 200 were wounded by the Puerto Rican Insular Police. They were ordered to commit this heinous crime by the then appointed governor of Puerto Rico, General Blanton C. Winship. The march in Ponce was a celebration for the end of slavery in Puerto Rico and a protest for the wrongful arrest and conviction of Pedro Albizu Campos, leader of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party.

## Places and Dominance

Streets among wooded  
paths, towns with names  
like Bayshore, Brentwood,  
Lake Ronkonkoma.

Roam and assimilate,  
languages other than  
English, discouraged,  
battered for skin-color,

heritage, dirty Puerto Rican,  
running, escaping,  
hating a history  
never taught, severed  
traditions to

hide from white teachers,  
neighbors, police  
who demand inculcation  
of their dominance,

running, racing,  
berating ghosts  
drawn from Bayamon,  
San Juan, Cabo Rojo

and a fight lost  
before inception,  
deceptive and comfortable  
in my colonized mind

built of playing  
cards, beatings, and  
scars buried to  
my marrow.

A fight--unremembering  
their parental  
belief in pleasing  
white mindsets

in places named  
Ponce, Utuado,  
Rincon, and Borike.

## Recipe for Illumination

16 prayer ties:  
cotton squares,  
all in red.

A pinch of  
tobacco and sage  
in each square,

folded, tied into  
little pouches,  
strung together.

The string must  
be red cotton, too.  
Concentrate,

focus on key  
questions as these  
little pouches

form. Store in  
a high place until  
the Sweat Lodge.

Fast 24 hours  
before ceremony.  
Maybe just herbal tea.

Day of Sweat Lodge,  
strip down,  
only shorts

and cold morning  
air, enter Lodge.  
Sweat. Sweat.

First person drones  
about their question,  
lightning bolt

shoved into  
top of the skull,  
Deminan's vision blinds,

body vibrates,  
a live wire  
in every nerve,

every blood vessel,  
you are everything,  
everyone! Sweat.

Excuse yourself,  
exit Sweat Lodge.  
Let bake in

bright afternoon  
sun.  
Reborn.

## The Stare

He stares  
up through his eyebrows  
at the photographer,  
a shy grimace  
of the moment  
etches the lips,

a pink, damp towel  
his only shield  
against a present,  
a future of abuse,

neglect. My brother  
also faces the camera,  
head down,  
wrapped in Diana's  
half embrace,  
eyeing an equal future  
that will twist him,  
form callouses on  
his anger and hate.  
Rosie, Laura, Elsie  
surround us,

a pretense of shelter  
in summer bliss,  
flashes of fun,  
few and futile.

I want to  
climb into  
that summer photograph,

hold my  
four-year-old self,  
impossibly brace  
him (us) for what's to come.

Face our father as  
I am now,  
for both of us.

Still he stares,  
as if promising me

we'll make it  
through the  
abuser's rage,  
eventually,  
for both of us.

Blanquito and the Sun  
after *Vita Nova* by Louise Glück

She dreamed me, I still remember it.

A glimmer of fear; her old eyes swimming in prescience.  
Whispered, since the void is empty with silence.

Then she hurried, past the Catholic sin of her third eye.

She spoke of a meadow, rolling hills, and an infant,  
a smile and blonde hair, green eyes laughing at the sun,  
in perfumed breezes, he sat.

*Blanquito. That one is special,*  
her hands shaking and pointing at his rose-colored cheeks,  
and laughter on that hill, a true eye thrown to a future;  
perchance riddled with beatings, and rejection.

Cruel  
blessings and Hail Marys  
blacken Great-Grandma's vision

of me, a spite buried years ago.

Shining as a witness, my sun  
holds me safe within Muses and faith—

though steeped, her prophecy,  
untouched by age,  
realized by Connecticut summers,  
strung together  
in Beat voices and  
3am movements,  
ravenous for art and love and light—

And this dream, those green eyes, now hazel  
smiling on bright rolling hills.

Her third eye turned that key, rhyme  
and verse and visions of poets  
under a warm sun, a smiling star.

Mal Oro

Their eyes are  
butcher knives,  
engulf as raging fire,

orbs of drowning pool blue,  
oily shale brown,  
shady mixed hazel,  
duplicitous green.

A natural human  
habit-to gaze

into the eyes,  
into the hate,  
buffeted by  
gelatinous fear  
of my olive-skinned face,

my livid face,  
my Latino state

of being, bleeding,  
seeing, heeding, needing,  
reeling from  
efforts to make me  
their Créole other. Create

me as another  
stock figure, foreign

sinner for walking,  
breathing, fucking,  
peeing, crying,  
kneeling before  
their cross of burden,

their loss of certainty-  
in my brown eyes.

Always the eyes,  
always.

## Pots and Pans and Reggaeton

The ghosts whisper *¡Que Mierda!* in his ear as pots and pans bang over and over in front of La Fortaleza. Reggaeton blasts the walls down. Governor Ricardo Rosselló sits in his office, hears those damned pots drilling into his brain. He wishes he'd never sent those Telegram texts. Fantasmas in La Fortaleza laugh at him, his weakness a cause of great derision and scorn. And the pots and pans won't stop, hundreds of thousands, a million pairs of hands pound his temples, demand his resignation.

His father, Pedro, hates reggaeton. Criminalized it. It just kept getting stronger, a chameleon on steroids.

Ricardo hates Telegram. But he can't criminalize it, since he used it so much, cursing miscreants and mayors. He stares at the resignation letter on his desk in front of him.

The pots and pans are getting louder. Old San Juan is flooded with screaming Puerto Ricans. La Fortaleza is under siege. Banging, banging...and banging. Reggaeton blaring. The ghosts are still laughing, now in front of his desk. Ricardo scowls at their taunts and curses. He decides he too hates reggaeton and picks up the pen.

## Playa Sucia in Twilight

One of these days a speaker's words will drone on just before the peppy strumming of Thomas Jefferson Wild's "I've No More Fucks to Give" blares out of nowhere, invading the quiet tears of friends and family, more friends than family. Nervous, anxious laughter will erupt from one or two, maybe Will or Sarah, necks craning to find out who started the song. The gathered, grieving expressions will focus on a woman, red-rimmed eyes smiling at everyone, defiant and pleased. Her hand will rest on the urn, etched with filigree shaped in a manifesto and a Muse's whisper, placed between the pernil, the white rice, and red kidney beans, this poem and a plane ticket tucked in her long jacket--San Juan, Puerto Rico stamped on the front.

Another one of these days a boat will stop, close to Playa Sucia, Cabo Rojo Lighthouse flashing on the coast. The waves will gurgle and lap the boat, almost upending the urn, etched with liminal shadows that slip between these words, forcing her to clutch at it. Not quite ready. She'll listen for that Spring in 2011, effortless in floating on her back, closer to Sucia's beach. I had been playing with the new underwater camera, taking snaps of her, of us, of the warm water we never wanted to leave. She'll wait to hear that one photo I took of her, gazing toward the beach's slow crescent, curving in the distance. Then, she'll empty my ashes into waters my DNA came from, gaze once more at the lighthouse, a flashing heartbeat in twilight.

## Suma

A smattering of cemis, artifacts, and genocide in Borike'n, Vieques, Culebra,  
where coqui's cries serenade Salomé every night as Deminan's scabs

and scars burn and blister--gifts for us all. Taroo's lover begs for  
needle beaked kisses beside pools and seas filled with Lumi's kind

and kin, blessed with Atabey's smile, Her holy gaze turned away from  
Aracibo and Caguax, Jumacao, and all caciques the Spaniards have

slaughtered, bohios razed to the ground for a Cristóbal Colón, a Ponce  
de Leon, and we're left with Yahima's silence, fountains, and gold,

flies humming over villages, quiet and still, no Atabey to scare away  
a John White, no Cofresí to wage a one-man war against imperialists,

foreigners, or Governor de la Torre. Guabancex laughs at Spanish  
soldiers, Her son, Jurakán, tosses a painter's house, an island colony,

no mercy, just crumbling buildings and hearts gliding down arroyos  
of Atabey. Jacinto's Reina bellows in wells and cruel Caribbean surfs

thundering over Wakes and a nation Betances mourns for, pleads for  
Oller to dream independence in Julia Burgos' journal as she struggles

with spoiled Gods laying waste to countryside and coast, while an author's  
abuela fights against cacique spirits and caracaracol portents, since mournful

are the cries of Xiorro, his spirit is restless for justice and broken chains,  
before a broken Don Pedro and an angry Lolita fight White Castle shoppers

and dingy tiles painted in stars and stripes. But Mariana still threads her  
needle for flags and still-born visions made of blood, bone, and Antillanos.

So how is displaying a cloth of hope, a flag of promise by a jibaro's son  
mean prison and solitary visits from Atabey? What Covid silent words

are seething and bleeding cantos of illicit misery and mas colonia drums  
for a dying Ponce, screaming and running, sobbing and praying

for no more massacres? And New York streets force a forgetting of heritage, Cabo  
Rojo, beatings, and marrows filled with Utuado, Borike. Now, illumination

in cosmic Lodges reawakens holy connections, pumps blood  
vessels to contend with festering wounds from abusive fathers, remembering

abuela visions of sun-drenched hills and rosy cheeks beneath green  
eyes and smiling stars. This Créole other, Latino sinner eyes a future

with pots, pans, and fantasmas forcing change en Isla del Encanto waiting  
for that day in twilight on crescent playas by a flashing lighthouse where

I return to origins and the sea. Because this is how I root out spices,  
from DNA to 3am visions, from Taino breath to whispering piratas,

in Sazon, cilantro, oregano, and rain forest tongues. I am home.

## Curriculum Vitae

Rod Carlos Rodriguez

Email: rodcarlosrodriguez@yahoo.com

I received my Bachelor of Arts in English/Creative Writing from the University of Texas at San Antonio (Summa Cum Laude) in December 2018. I also received my Associates of Applied Science in Network Administration from Northwest Vista College in May 2014.

I began writing at 15 years old. My poems have been published in literary journals, anthologies, and magazines nationally and internationally. I've been interviewed on television news shows and radio shows regionally and internationally. My first poetry collection, *Exploits of a Sun Poet* (Pecan Grove Press, February 2003), was awarded the San Antonio Barnes and Noble/Bookstop Author-of-the-Month, February 2003 and also the San Antonio Current Best Book of 2005. I began the Sun Poetic Times literary-visual arts magazine in 1994, founded the Sun Poet's Society in 1995 and co-founded the Sun Arts Foundation in 2004. The Sun Poet's Society is known today around the world and celebrated its 25th Anniversary in March 2020. I have mentored and taught writing workshops in elementary, middle schools, high schools, and to people of all ages, backgrounds, and genres. I was nominated for the San Antonio Poet Laureate in April 2012, April 2014, April 2016, and April 2018. My second collection of poetry and art photography, *Lucid Affairs*, was published by Sun Arts Press and is now in its third edition. More recently, my third collection of poetry, *Native Instincts*, was published in January 2016 by Human Error Publishing. I served as enlisted in the United States Air Force for 7 years, active, and 1 year, inactive.

I have applied for and been a panelist at writing conferences for Gemini Ink (July 2019, San Antonio, Texas) and Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP21) Conference in Kansas City, Missouri, March 2021.