

# LA NORIA

*literary journal*



Volume 1, Number 2

August 2013

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**VAO**  
*publishing*

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A collaborative project of We Need Words and VAO Publishing, La Noria Literary Journal provides a venue for writers who draw words from the creative wells of Hispanic and border culture. The hybrid on-line/print journal publishes three electronic editions each April, August and December, with a trade paperback annual each January.

A *noria* (Spanish, from the Arabic *na'ura*) is a water wheel that can draw multiple buckets of water from a well in quick succession. Developed by Muslim engineers in Spain during medieval times (based on Roman and Greek prototypes), norias were vital tools in irrigation. We selected this term to serve as a symbol of our goal: to draw forth a flood of words from the deep wells of our culture (Hispanic, border or Southwestern) to irrigate the minds of our readers.

La Noria has no political bias to shill, no philosophical or critical stance to promote, no lofty academic aspirations to realize: we just love good literature, the Río Grande Valley, the Southwest, and Hispanic culture in general. We will publish any genre, any subject matter, any writer at all...as long as the piece appeals to those simple guidelines.

Good literature with a cultural bent: that's what we want to read. We believe that art can be a mirror in which we see ourselves and the world more clearly, a well in whose still waters we find the truth reflected.

Enjoy the fantastic work we've brought together for this second issue, and come back for more in December!

Rachel Vela  
David Bowles

# POETRY



**AT TIMES YOU GO**

from one darkness to another,  
at times you stumble  
and land in the light. Your  
ma, your pa, never said  
nothing about all this

fences on high hills,  
horses under the trees,  
what do they dream?  
Would you bargain  
with the devil for a  
lifetime of good sleep?

—Chuck Taylor

## POET BEFORE MFAS

You know me, the one who got away,  
silent and cool under my rock, or lounging  
the day over a cup of Joe, talking to friends  
who come and go. I was here before you  
came to life on this small planet. I make my  
way floating from place to place, from gorgeous  
shabby hotels to back street dim lit motels,  
checking the cushions of lobby sofas in the  
plusher downtown places, cleaning out all  
the lost coins that yearn for pockets, riding  
off on unlocked bicycles. You know me, you  
don't know me, I was here before the flood  
and hid away with the sheep in Noah's boat.  
And where in these times do I put my head  
down for sleep? Back of an unlocked car,  
a forgotten room where a party rages with  
the lack of meaning humans need, the room  
where people pile their heavy coats when  
the wind spins cold, I'm buried beneath,  
asleep but always leave in two, big as a god,  
one coat certain to pawn. The pigeons  
will never give away my secrets. You read  
my lines in college classes and curse my  
name with the tests you have to take, before  
you win that sheepskin degree, buy your house  
in some suburban town, commute to work  
and change diapers. One night, while walking  
the dog under the moon, my name, and few  
lines I wrote, may come to mind. You know  
you're dying. I hope to make a rueful smile  
and lift you out of your common sorrows.

—Chuck Taylor

## SUGAR LOAF MOUNTAIN

Everything I know of this upthrust rock is oral, or out of the eyes, or out of the true movement of shoulders, out of a hole in a fence, out of the lack of no trespassing signs, out of a dirt road winding, out of the thick faces of trees like crowds filling a square, out of the air, out of the wet sweet wind, out of the lichen, out of the nothing that I know. The mouths say the Tonkawa came here, the mouths say that ceremonies were performed. It's possible. The Tonkawa don't answer the emails I throw at them in Oklahoma. The view from the top will impress if you're a flat lander, fields of sorghum below green by irrigation out of the Brazos, some brown below with the coming summer drought, old beer cans light our way through the brush up to the summit. I tell my friend from Spain that over this cliff I can see the faces of gods and we stand for the moment free of the perpetual dust our species loves to churn to obliterate the stars. He has nothing of that inside and wonders if we get it from the Indians or from Emerson and I say old E may have gotten it from the Germans, and over here was the land, of slaves I say, the fecund bottoms where they could grow crop after crop of cotton to float down river or put on trains to Galveston to be compressed and shipped to Britain for the mills that made Britannia empire clothes, small children's hands tending the bobbins. Muddy brown the Brazos below us near we can't see here in the winds. Our day is light, insubstantial, and weightless, bending perhaps around important planets while spiriting away. Does the light make music out of ...? Who has ears to hear?

The swallows down under the new bridge  
across the Brazos believe concrete to be  
a limestone ledge—they feast on bugs  
and build their nests happy in biological  
rhythm oblivion, and yes, like I, like you,  
they know they fall in their going to die.

—Chuck Taylor

## THE WOUND DRESSER

Fearful, shaking,  
his hands find  
patterns in the remnants  
of bodies flung  
like shrapnel.

Needles, thread,  
he turns seamstress,  
closing and reattaching  
scraps of the fallen.

Here a boy's eye,  
there a hand roughly  
severed at the wrist.

He puzzles how  
infection and inflection  
are two sides  
of an unbalanced coin.

Come closer, one whispers.  
Give this to my girl.

A bit of doggerel  
betrayed by a handsome script,  
the heart's last grasp  
of sentimentality.

Nodding, he praises it  
inwardly as a voice of the ages,  
pockets it and patches  
uselessly,  
what will never move again.

—Álvaro Rodríguez

**CAMP CHASE**

There comes a notoriety in death and dying  
he is only now beginning to appreciate,  
like birdsong and wine.

This place is etched into the earth  
and the annals, a long sinuous gash,  
clean and ragged at once,  
a rending and a rendering.

He builds a wall of memories,  
his own prison in which to reside,  
assembling from stone  
an identity of his own.

—Álvaro Rodríguez

## LOS OLVIDADOS

babies of the street, fatherless,  
motherless,  
huddle against their secret selves  
believing  
there is safety in numbers.

there are no flowers under their feet,  
no beds,  
no rooms,  
no new mornings.

in a moment,  
one will turn to his brother  
who is not his brother  
and slay him as cain  
did abel,  
smiling the smile  
of not knowing.

in the evening,  
there will be meat.

—Álvaro Rodríguez

RIVERTOWN

a trickle of water tries  
to recall a sense of flowing

a man moves soundlessly  
shuffling

eyes following the space  
just in front of his feet

searching for his lost crown.

—Álvaro Rodríguez

**RED**

A palm tree waves to me  
like a woman's long hair in a breeze.

Bougainvillea, never satisfied, has climbed  
the small tree next to it, then the cactus,

red in places reserved for the powder  
of clouds, the mockingbird nest.

Who can blame it? Across the way  
a pine tree humbly accepts the assault

and red claims branches that lift  
with prayers from hands of stigmata.

This famous color invades dreams  
when they're shadows of gray and black.

Film noir keeps the lid on tight,  
hides Carmen's skirt in the habanera,

When red comes, and it will, open the gate,  
start the music, smell the grape before you drink.

—Shirley Ricket

## EL ACRÓBATA

Escribo este poema  
porque mañana ya no existiré.

El miedo que consume mis adentros  
se vuelve cada vez más doloroso.

Es como un monstruo sediento  
que está bebiendo mi sangre  
absorbiendo mi vida.

El éxtasis de un crimen.  
Extirpar el corazón palpitante de un cerdo.  
La sangre en la entrepierna de una doncella.

Eyacular mil demonios en la espalda de una ramera.  
La historia de mi vida, mi sombra, mi pesadilla.  
El origen de mis deseos.

Quiero morir hoy y nacer mañana.  
Banderas blancas que gimen de placer.  
Tener un epitafio alegórico escrito sobre piel humana.  
Crucificar lobos en cruces de plomo.

Encontrar el equilibrio y fecundar la libertad.

Escribo este poema  
porque mañana será mañana.

El deseo que consume mis adentros  
es un torrente de hormigas encendidas.

Es el espíritu de Baco como volcán  
haciendo erupciones en mi sexo.

La torre de Babel no se construyó en un día.  
Hay gente que ladra como perros y perros que buscan misericordia.  
Las fauces de la tormenta trituran mi esencia, la iniciativa se pudre como una ciruela.

El cielo derrama su vómito sobre mi país.  
Hay ratas de sangre. Hay ratas de mierda.  
Existe un imperio de polvo donde el más repugnante es emperador.

Hay un enjambre en mi cerebro.  
Un desfile de cuchillos escurre de tu boca.  
El misterio de tus sabores etéreos ya no es un misterio.

Encontrar el equilibrio y volver a nacer.

—Alejandro Cabada

**ENGLISH, MAN**

English, man! Please!  
Not broken fragments of a language  
You're not going to understand yourself  
If I speak it to you  
For I was there  
With two fingers in the air and 3 to my grave  
I spoke the words of your "Peacemaker"  
I've spoken many languages over the years  
But hid eyes behind a cactus on brown skin  
Riding trails to keep a sundown ahead of a noose  
Always seen as the Outlaw, though I fought  
For your independence  
And right to deny me of mine  
Left now with no land  
With walls and fences to keep me from calling anywhere home  
Out on the range there is no border  
But I was there before I was driven out  
And stayed to be trapped in

—Javier Tovías

## FOTOS Y RECUERDOS

Como quisiera estar allá  
 Cuando me la pintaban bonito  
 When all everyone saw was a hero  
 When home was the one thing that nothing else could equal  
 And opportunities weren't required because I carried all I needed  
 Fotos y recuerdos, memories of the past  
 But in this life of frost, nothing gold can last  
 And leaves subside in clusters  
 The oak stands tall but hollowed, only the roots sustain  
 From all our fight what have we left to gain  
 Inside dead, but with a straight face, we muster  
 Assembling pieces of happiness only held together by faith  
 No longer living blind burns the eyes  
 So we shall leave this to the Fates  
 Spinning and spinning but they cannot cut what has no measure  
 "Y estoy aquí, borracho y loco"  
 Sí, estoy aquí, being torn to pieces, poco a poco  
 Because for all these years that I marched forward  
 All I had to look at was that "foto"  
 Sana, sana  
 Tomo de aguas santas en donde su beso era mi suero  
 Y fuerte la llama que encendió  
 Pero por esa misma lumbre, el encino ya ha muerto  
 And what is left is dried and charred  
 And all that sprouts are broken recuerdos  
 De un soldado extranjero

—Javier Tovías

## SU CUMPLEAÑOS

Levanten botellas y vasos  
Y todas para el aire  
Pa' 'riba, pa' 'bajo, pal centro, pa' 'dentro y cáele  
A la fiesta, saludos a todos en este baile  
Y gracias por venir, aunque se vayan solos  
Pero no queremos eso, suban el volumen  
Todos a bailar como locos  
Hombres, pesquen a la chica a su izquierda o derecha  
Ponte a mover  
Si les falta la lumbre, yo tengo la mecha  
Diviértense  
Número uno, es siempre la meta  
Todos estamos aquí por lo mismo, ya saben que se celebra  
Segundo, que no se pare el ritmo  
Ven como la música los tiene bien prendidos  
“Tche, tcherere tche tche”  
Así como la balada del Gustavito  
Hasta la madrugada que se oigan los gritos  
Número tres, el bartender ya se lo sabe  
Que se sequen las copas  
Ves como los tragos se pasan muy suave  
Como esta chiquilla,  
Añadiendo el tiempo como la tequila  
Nunca nos pondremos viejos  
Seguimos mejorando día por día  
Bueno, ya me despido para que siga la fiesta  
Que se sigan mirando las sonrisas  
Y que siempre vengan más tiempos como éste

—Javier Tovías

## TIRANDO ROLLO

¡Gracias por nada!  
 Este vato que watchas aquí,  
 Abandonado  
 Sin raza  
 Sigue fuerte por su causa  
 Call me what you want, ése  
 Este chicano he caminado estas tierras desde el tiempo del maya  
 Used to wear out the shine on my calcos  
 Now I'm cruising in my ramfla with a fine heina  
 Pero tírame al león  
 Yeah, I made it out the barrio  
 Pero chale que se me olvidó  
 You putos got it made in the shade  
 You think I went off to fight a war for some pinche gringo  
 Pendejo,  
 Esta es tierra del indio  
 El azteca tirando guante con el poder para traer pa' tras  
 El Anáhuac  
 ¡Caéle!  
 Como quieras homie y donde  
 Pinches changos en sus chanclas  
 Like the Pope said,  
 "Levanta tus pinches cacahuates y ponle"  
 ¿Quiubolé?  
 ¿De quién chon, Papa?

—Javier Tovías

## ÉPOCA

I'm a two dimensional silhouette  
that disappears with the voice  
of an orphan sun,

-disconnected glow

beauty personified  
like the connection  
of coffee and chocolate

I'm a dance  
that claps hands  
with the momentary tune  
of my body in bloom

a sweat  
that trickles  
down the back of love  
resting on laurels

I am the agony  
and the ecstasy  
of the trailing serenade

my eyes fixated  
on the death of the leaves  
crunching below  
as I step closer  
to Autumns end

love is forgetting  
about me  
like my shadow

it's seeping into the trees  
to steal the sap  
that creates life

—Edward Vidaurre

## BORDE BERMELLÓN

veiled threat  
 on which fights jump off  
 into city streets,  
 mass transit, supermercado chants,  
 y tenderos

despacito,  
 fingers do the talking  
 sending lips into seclusion  
 making soft sounds  
 extinct

lips,  
 ode to dandelion  
 seeds exploding in air,  
 ode to frowns  
 haciendo muecas,  
 ode to songs  
 lyp synced,  
 ode to gritos  
 across colonias,  
 ode to last breaths

words get stuck behind  
 teeth, like teclas on  
 máquinas de escribir

labios que cuentan  
 historias, cantan canciones,  
 besan dolores, that make  
 love by just pushing  
 words into existence.

—Edward Vidaurre

**MAREADO**

breaking the seventh seal.  
blasting into the apocalyptic  
season, blasting into the minor  
and major faults of diseased  
decades. Half valve piercings  
into the decrepit walls of hunger,  
orchestral hallelujah, the sound is heard  
and looked for but never found.

brass suicides are reported on  
all corners of the earth, one especially  
outside your window,  
-dying in the middle of a serenade gone mute.

it's a sound hidden, riddled with anguish,  
a metaphor for an open disguise. Play on  
and on and on and on until my ears bleed ,  
until my ears bleed, play it again and again,  
until my eyes hear what my ears can't see.

blow your horn into the ant pile at my feet,  
into the voices that drive me mad in my sleep,  
blow hard, make the sound push the forgotten  
souls closer to their resting place, blow softly  
until flowers open their hearts for the hummingbird  
to tickle them to death.

blow daddy!

—Edward Vidaurre

## DON LUCÍO, SITTING ON HIS VOLCANIC BACK

He greets me, still  
 sitting down on  
 a porous rock,  
 old, weathered, made  
 from the cerros above.  
 Greets the same way  
 he greets every stranger—  
 nods his head,  
 holds the edge  
 of a sombrero  
 campesino. He  
 looks up at me,  
 doesn't recognize yet.  
 His hand, todo cafecito,  
 extends, traced in blue veins,  
 scarred knuckles,  
 a drunken accident  
 some Bracero night long ago  
 —shakes my hand  
 ¿Que dice, viejo?  
 Standard Saludo.  
 I am in his way,  
 watching the pueblo die  
 before his one good eye  
 gave up. Waiting on an old friend,  
 so he can talk about things-  
 the young men wanting to leave,  
 chasing money and women,  
 grandchildren he can't remember  
 the names, for the sun  
 to come out sooner.  
 The sun is on his face  
 coloring it in mahogany wrinkles.  
 He takes off the sombrero,  
 remembers me  
 remembers the son.  
 El sol, tan sabro el sol.

—Lupe Méndez

WHAT A BREAK-UP LOOKS LIKE (CUANDO TRONARON)

A ten year old  
peeks  
keyhole curiosities.  
Appendages blur  
past his bedtime.  
He asks his apá  
why Tío Reymundo  
is here, has moved  
into his room,  
visits with ladies,  
won't go home,  
warm,  
with Tia Gloria.  
She cries on  
the phone terribly,  
cold.  
Tells his apá,  
sleeping  
on the sofa is fine,  
knows now what  
a woman is,  
naked, her chi-chis  
uncovered,  
won't slumber with  
all the noise,  
sees all the ladies  
(remind him of tia),  
spend the night.  
They never hello  
or goodbye.  
Wonders if tío's  
golozo plate  
is as empty  
as his plática.

—Lupe Méndez

**PERPETUALLY GROWLS**

He is a 9-year-old artist—  
dirty Filas, ripped jeans.  
His home is now the school,  
draws forever on the walls.

Creates love notes for chiquitas.  
Draws the best sol,  
captures largatijas at recess,  
king of the columpios.

He won't write in words.  
Cries when it's his turn  
to read from one  
thicker chapter book.

Trades knuckles with bigger  
kids behind the dumpster,  
for stealing food from plates.  
He is lightweight, the fighter.

He would rather do math.  
Figures out his hermanitos'  
next four bus stops,  
dinner and more markers.

Ignores useless adults.  
Tells you straight faced.  
His papito huffs paint, says—  
papá gives me color headaches.

He just keeps drawing.  
Smiles. Says it's what feeds him  
at night, yet, his stomach,  
perpetually growls.

—Lupe Méndez

## HIPS, DEFINED

Hips deliver-  
not perversely,  
but clearly, in a beat.

They commit, they connect  
to femurs and ankles,  
heart beats and brain pulse –  
they speak in a sweet voice,

the wider they are,  
the more experienced  
they bounce. They entertain

bass in melody, controlling  
the production of enjoyment  
rather deeply, they gather tension,  
side to side, isolated on a wood floor

during a dj's rendition of Sade,  
or a collaboration involving a salsa  
band or the merging of liquid spirits

past dark lit smiles and fluttering fingers-  
jeans and juapangos,  
Charlie Wilson and samba, recharge  
these hips. Hips that manage to make

their way to the nerve, they serve  
to add spice, to enrich the elixir  
of delicate dedication.

Hips breathe long.  
Hips groan,  
Hips speak in four-fourths  
Hips beckon and

pause only to catch a gasp, a view  
what they have journeyed,  
what they have delved into.

They support the soul.  
Hips deliver in moments  
what a mind can't even mention,  
what a heart only dares skip.

—Lupe Méndez

## HOMETOWN

I know a not so far away place  
Where I seem to remotely recognize everyone's face  
In between nothing and surrounded by nil  
It is a spot that has a certain appeal  
It is not quite rubble nor covered in sand  
But it is never the less a wasteland  
This is neither an insult nor is it a curse  
For I know of places that are far worse  
It just has that sort of mediocre vibe  
But it is inhabited by my native tribe  
Yes, you see it is true  
That my dearest of friends inhabit this place too  
High upon the plains of Texas you see  
Are the memories that are closest to me  
We come together from time to time  
To cause mild trouble and merely unwind  
To share in each other's harrowing victories  
And further ex-posit upon life's mysteries  
Growing older and spreading apart  
We all remember that here it did start  
Adolescent decisions and hormonal delusions  
But better times, we could not chose one  
And sooner than later will we again meet  
And as always with banter and insults will we greet  
So hold little spite for this particular rendition  
It is merely the writer's way of releasing his nostalgic condition

—Cody Jemes

**DARK**

Gently nothing  
 Stillness grasps the evening air  
 Clamoring quietly

—Cody Jemes

**FOUR-WHEELED FANTASY**

She used to be something  
 Something extraordinary,  
 Something fresh and glossy  
 A crowning accomplishment  
 Truly something to behold  
 She was dynamic  
 She never once winced at sign the work  
 No matter how arduous  
 No matter how long the hours  
 She'd gladly give you all she had  
 Without grumble or objection  
 Out past the midnight hour when you called her  
 Yet she was up early the next morning awaiting you  
 Eager for another day  
 Anxious for more  
 She's never confessed defeat  
 Even when it was so evident  
 Though the same cannot be said for her composition  
 But gumption only goes so far  
 Innovation and time suppress us all  
 Bigger, quicker, brawnier, better  
 The formula for obsolescence  
 But she's still there  
 Lost amongst rust and ghosts  
 Derelict amid the wasteland  
 But her stalwart spirit remains  
 Waiting

—Cody Jemes

**ALARM CLOCK**

Still;  
Somber  
Still somber  
Early morning that I'd almost forgotten  
Quietly radiant  
Placidly perfect  
Lacking malice  
Lacking greed  
Calmly deliberate  
Still;  
Somber morning  
I await your embrace

—Cody Jemes

THE COMMON DENOMINATOR  
OF THE AFTERNOON MANICURE

Hot air breathed down our necks  
as my mother and I entered the nail salon.  
*What you like today?*  
the Vietnamese man  
asked under a thick blanket of ethnicity.

*French tips for her*  
my mom answered pointing to me,  
*and American for me*  
The man nodded deeply,  
the boldly golden Jesus  
around his sunburnt neck  
danced with his movements.  
He pointed to a Mexican  
manicurist for my mom  
- escorted me to his own booth.  
I sat as he began his careful work.  
I sweat in an ethnically awkward silence.

\*\*\*

*What you doing?!*  
he yelled to the Mexican lady  
in his broken English. *No, no good! Do again*

The manicurist rolled her eyes and r's  
in a curse underneath her mother's tongue,  
apologized in a tangy version of English.  
My mother nodded, her face painted  
with German guilt and little beads of sweat.

The man doing my manicure  
continued his work, and asked  
me if I was: *too hot*  
but his words were spiced with Vietnamese  
and I couldn't uncover what he was saying -  
so I just nodded dumbly.  
He got up and, praise our one common denominator,  
he turned on the AC.

—Katherine Hoerth

**DULCE**

His body wrapped in folds of black exhaust,  
my father fumbles with a wrench, his head  
is lost inside a pick-up's propped up hood.  
I hear him curse the Texas heat. I laugh,  
and tap his sunburnt shoulder, offer him  
a bowl of melting ice cream. *Caramel?*  
he asks, and grabs it with grease-stippled hands.  
*Dulce de leche*, words slide off my tongue.

He asks me where I learned to talk like that.  
Behind this truck, a boy with soft dark hands,  
smooth tongue like caramel. But I don't say,  
just shrug, breath in the heavy smell of fumes,  
with melting ice cream sticky on my hands.

—Katherine Hoerth

**AT THE LOWES GARDEN CENTER IN SAN JUAN, TEXAS**

I hope to catch an aftertaste of home,  
of pine, the north woods on my fingertips  
touching a living Christmas tree at Lowes

of San Juan, Texas. Here, December feels  
like spring up north – with wrens migrating south  
to winter in the sun with butterflies.

Enclosed in air conditioned breeze, the palm  
trees sparkle, draped in strands of Christmas lights  
and tinsel, cotton balls in place of snow.

With glittered boughs, the spruce, too, shines below  
flescent lights and glistens like the hope  
in migrants' eyes. "You'll never learn to thrive

in this south Texas soil," I curse, and dream  
the scent of pine cones ripening, the crunch  
of north wood snow beneath my fur lined boots.

—Katherine Hoerth

**THEY ARE COMING**

Chased across the burning earth  
Hidden inside cars and vans  
Barricaded in old homes.

What we do won't matter,  
They are coming.

Swarms searching through cities  
Hundreds ripped away, still looking for more.  
Always hunting, always hungry.

Never satisfied with millions caught,  
They are coming.

To them, surviving is a crime  
Can't live there or even here  
Both sides infested with monsters.

Won't allow us be living beings,  
They are coming.

Home becomes a country of graves  
The free land is a little white myth  
Accusing us of draining fortunes.

Seeing each other as sub-humans and say  
They are coming.

—Diana Elizondo

## OVERWHELMED

Humanity spiraling beyond devolution  
Revolting wild beasts with outrageous acts  
Fueled by sadism, instead of ancestral instinct.  
Disappointments committed in gleeful ignorance.

Hopelessly searching small ounce of improvement,  
Observations taking toll, tired of atrocious reruns  
Performed by various eras, none learned a damn thing.

Civilizations prevent progress with countless dead-ends  
Harsh labyrinths built miles wide without exits  
Mocking poor fools wanting equal happiness  
Such privileges reserved for promoters of hate.

From furs to suits, survival instincts reduced to civilized savagery  
Playing Death excused for symptoms of psychotic disease.  
Filled with possessive paranoia or bloody offerings for Lovecraftian gods.

Life and media blended from poorly structured barriers  
Bringing confusion in knowing reality  
Lunatics exploited by numerous screens, despised in awe.  
Gaining recognition from both infamy and praise.

Species' progression fueled by deadly sins  
Apathy is the key to human existence.  
Like wire, denial suffocates and tightens.

I admit redemption's far from arrival.  
The messenger enters with good news, but his smile fades  
Looking down at my third eye, freshly made by lead.  
Heated barrel in one hand, crumbled paper in another.

Just another overwhelmed fool  
Forget the note and take me away.

—Diana Elizondo

**THERAPY**

Poisoning minds to rid their ailments  
Healers hide ignorance behind bright coats and degrees  
While prescribing smiles mask sadistic apathy.

Reckless treatments paralyze chatty lunatics  
Into breathing bodies robbed of souls and tongues.

Protecting the sane by imprisoning the abnormal in white cells,  
Contagious insanity, superstition long discredited  
Strongly upheld by professional paranoia.

Cries echoing through halls mistaken for crazed fury,  
Suffering ignored and caged like the eternally damned.

From manic to withdrawn,  
Zombies made from pills, replacing volts.  
Voodoo performed in civilized manner.

Brains injected with chemicals  
No space for real relief.

Can the madness really end?

—Diana Elizondo

## BEING POETIC

Depicted beauty spawned from self-destruction  
Devotion displayed in sheets scarred by fresh ink  
Every worded infliction exposes raw emotions  
Sublime passions and nightmarish fears filled in each text.  
Slowly baring souls, forcing minds to spill on the lines.

Creativity produced from mental masochism and physical strain  
Throbbing aches as thoughts boil inside a globe of bone  
Manifesting into a vicious offspring's birth  
Breaking through layers of membrane and skull.

Seeking talented idols of old for inspiration  
Harnessing spirits from their scriptures and scent smoke  
Motivated to nocturnal trance without eyes closed  
While torturing our hands from writing incantations.  
Powers granted from hours of dedicated perfection.

Gaining loved ones and casting hexes on enemies' heads.  
Summoning Wrath to spit acid at society's eyes  
Expressing personal ideals and cynicism in cryptic tongue  
And bloody lavender, resulting fatigue and twisted spines.

Mysterious, aching rituals performed by sleepless souls.  
The harsh trials of being poetic.

—Diana Elizondo

## THE WOMAN AND THE FOUNTAIN

She dips her feet  
into the cool water  
under the July sun  
that pushes down

on her  
bare brown shoulders  
and her  
brown calves  
that want to be dancers

like the leaf shadows  
on the other side  
of the fountain

her husband  
takes a picture  
that reflects  
his face  
on her  
mirror sunglasses

In the double portrait  
he stares  
at himself

and her  
and himself  
and her

and her

and the fountain  
and her

the surreal moment  
simmers  
in the summer heat

the mirage  
shimmers  
pulsates  
evaporates

like the shadow  
of the thirsty black bird  
that waited

for the woman  
to leave  
before  
it took a drink.

—César de León

**MY BONES KNOW**

My bones know  
when it is going to rain  
before the clouds decide  
to turn the corner  
with no reason  
but just because

My bones know  
the feel of a hammer  
hanging from my hip  
a bag of books on my back  
a box of freight on my shoulder  
a back pocket with more words  
than dollars

They know the weight  
of my parent's heads  
against my head  
when they kiss me  
on New Year's Eve  
and the weight  
of my lover's hands  
on my thighs  
after the bar closes

My bones know  
forty years of walking  
on asphalt and concrete  
twenty years of kneeling  
down to make a buck  
ten years of loving  
without guilt or giving a shit

My bones know the silence  
Of being alone all day  
sleeping on a couch  
until the rhythm of night birds  
calls them out to smell  
the boozy breath of the moon

they know the hush  
between the colors of the sunrise  
and the 8am bumper  
to bumper breakfast taco  
coffee cigarette anti-anxiety pill  
traffic orgy  
that ends up right where it started

My bones know of  
other bones buried  
under velvet river stones  
unknown

My bones know the exact  
hour when they will cease  
to exist down to the dirty second  
but they won't tell me

My bones scare me  
they know too much  
sometimes they feel heavy  
resting in their ivory sockets

—César de León

## ENTRE PALABRAS

Tengo sed de palabras  
 con olor a tierra mojada  
 y sabor a río  
 palabras refrescantes  
     como el agua en los cantaros de barro  
     de mi abuela  
     como el agua de norias antiguas  
 palabras que me empapan la frente  
 con ilusiones  
 y me revivan el alma.

Tengo hambre de voces calcinantes  
     como el sol de mediodía  
 voces que me cieguen con su resplandor  
     que me hagan sudar  
     que me tuesten la piel  
     que me quemem el corazón y las entrañas

Quiero volar entre palabras de mil colores  
 que broten de bocas vivas  
     como nubes de mariposas  
     como parvadas de Quetzales  
     como cascadas de estrellas  
 en un amanecer perpetuo  
 pintado por lenguas tornasol

Quiero emborracharme  
 con versos infinitos y enloquecidos  
 endulzados con miel de agave  
 y ritmos hipnóticos  
     que me hagan alucinar  
     que me hagan delirar  
     que me transporten a laberintos espirales  
 de metáforas eternas  
 y descubrir entre sus sombras azules  
 palabras prohibidas  
     que me hagan temblar en éxtasis  
     que me hagan vibrar desde mi centro cósmico

Quiero quedarme dormido  
al son de cantos ancestrales  
entrelazados con lenguas mestizas  
y palabras futuristas  
    que me hagan soñar  
    que me revelen un futuro sin fronteras  
plasmado en un poema universal e infinito

Quiero morir de poesía  
y renacer en un mar de palabras.

—César de León

## WHO AM I? JOSÉ ON A JOURNEY

Who Am I? I am José.  
 José on a Journey  
 I graduated with a BS  
 I continued on with a MS  
 even smaller odds of doing it.

I am José, this is my journey.  
 I lived in California.  
 My fellow cousins.  
 The California flag is dear to me.  
 Though I did not march in California, I was with them in spirit.

I am José.  
 I am a Texan  
 I marched in Dallas, Texas, in 2006.  
 Immigration reform,  
 Half a million marched.  
 Sí se puede.

I am José.  
 I marched in the 10th Anniversary César Chávez March  
 In San Juan, Texas.  
 We are many in red.  
 We march with Little Joe  
 Who marched with César Chávez.  
 We are GREAT!  
 We are one.  
 ¡Sí se puede!

I am José.  
 Time will tell when we make history.  
 Have faith,  
 Have hope,  
 We are together.  
 ¡SÍ se puede!

—José Castilleja



**PROSE**



## HOME

Gilberto slowly approached the old wooden door of his family's house. His grandparents bought it in the 1960's with money they earned after years of them and their children breaking their backs in the fields. It was once a bright pink color, but now the bricks have faded into almost light beige. It began as a modest two-bedroom home, but over time a third bedroom and bathroom were added to accommodate their growing family. These additions were never contracted out, but were added by and under the direction of Gilberto's grandfather José. In fact the wooden carport which stretched out before the front door was built by Gilberto and his grandfather. The carport was the last addition to the home: every time Gilberto walked underneath it, he stared up at some of the nails he had accidentally punched through and were now exposed to the elements. Invariably he would smile. The smile was not just due to his bad carpentry skills, but because his fondest memories were of doing any kind of works with his grandfather. He would accompany his grandfather to mow lawns, cut down trees, and even weed gardens. All the while, Gilberto would stare at his grandfather and marvel at the energy and strength of what he assumed to be an elderly man.

However the true matriarch of the family and the person who just exuded strength and respect was his grandmother Maria. For as long as Gilberto could remember, his grandmother had never spoken to him in anger, and always appeared with the most congenial personality, but Gilberto and everyone else in the family feared her. Not that she was mean, at least not around Gilberto; she just commanded respect in her actions and in her countenance. Nevertheless, she was loved and revered by all. Also, it was not just the family that treated her with respect: she was an active member of the community, attended political rallies, and knew every priest in the local Catholic Church. In short, her influence knew no bounds.

Gilberto fumbled in his pockets for the keys to the home. He felt odd doing so, because for the whole of his life he would simply open the door and walk in. Somebody was always home and all family was welcome at any time. In fact, there were times when cousins, aunts, uncles, would all be visiting from upstate and somehow, room was made for everyone to spend the night. Of course, with every visit there would be a barbecue. A barbecue in which the fire was lit at three in the afternoon and the cooking commenced all the way until late in the evening. Gilberto's father Luis would stand at the pit, beer in hand, along with Gilberto's uncles, John and Hugo. They would talk and laugh throughout the night. The music would play a rather eclectic mix of Tejano, corridos, and some country (Maria's favorite was Hank Williams, Sr.). As the empty beer cans were replaced with full ones, Gilberto and all his cousins would stare at the empties littering the ground,

knowing the next morning they would be tasked to collect and bag them. Gilberto especially enjoyed this aspect of the barbecue, due to the fact that he was allowed to recycle them for money, which he was allowed to keep. He would usually only garner fourteen or fifteen dollars, but for a young teenager in the 1980's, it was a lot.

Gilberto pulled the squeaky screen door open and placed the first key in the deadbolt and then the doorknob, swinging it open he instinctively smelled the air. This was an old habit which came from years of visits in which, at each opening of the door, a visitor was confronted with the smells of food either being cooked or served. No matter what time of the day it was, there was always an offer of food, either, "stay and wait while it finishes" or "let me reheat you what we made earlier." During Gilberto's childhood and on into his early adulthood, if there had not been a barbecue the night before (or sometimes even if there was) everyone came for Sunday lunch. The dishes served ranged from menudo, baked ribs, beef soup, and on what Gilberto considered to be lucky days, "calabaza con pollo."

Now, in vain, Gilberto sniffed the air only to perceive an old dusty smell. Before him was an empty living room and on the wall an old metal gas furnace for those rare Rio Grande Valley cold nights. Staring into the vacant living room, Gilberto's mind was flooded with memories of various relatives who had sometimes left the house in a "standing room only" type of occupancy. His grandmother Maria would sit on the couch and hold court with her sisters, cousins, and the rest of the family. Jokes were exchanged and countless of stories which if taken down and recorded would probably reveal the whole history of their small town of Donna from its inception to the present. The large television set would either be displaying old cowboy or Mexican movies. Of course, if there was a football game on featuring the Dallas Cowboys, then the men would be in the living room watching and the women would be seated in and around the kitchen table.

It was the vision of his grandmother seated at the table which drew Gilberto's eyes toward it. Of all the furniture which had been removed from the house over the years, no one touched the kitchen table. Would one remove the altar from a church? The table was especially significant due to the fact that there was one particular seat everyone was afraid to touch; at the head of the table, at every meal, sat Grandmother Maria. To her left hand side would be seated José (Gilberto's grandfather) and the rest found seats where they may, but no one took the seat at the head of the table, save Maria. For years after she passed away, Gilberto's family would hold family gathering there and everyone instinctively and out reverence avoided sitting at the head of the table.

Gilberto slowly made his way to the kitchen table, the arthritis in his knees was starting to flare up and he leaned more on his cane. As he sat on the opposite end of the head of the table, Gilberto could feel all his seventy years begin to fade away. He looked toward where his grandmother sat and felt twelve years old again. He smiled as the image of his grandmother seated before him entered his mind. Her curly black hair shot through with grey, her large round glasses, and her pleasant smile all came into view. Seated to her left sat his grandfather, eating heartily like he always did, the veins and muscles along his arms reflected years of physical labor, of which he never complained. Next to his grandfather and nearest to Gilberto sat his father Luis, dressed in a Dallas Cowboy t-shirt and asking for the salt shaker. Standing behind his grandmother was Gilberto's mother serving him a plate of "calabaza con pollo" and talking to Grandma Maria about what dishes to make for the upcoming Thanksgiving Day dinner. To Gilberto's left was his brother Jaime, followed by his sister Carla, each separated from him by two years. Gilberto's other sister Suzanne was standing next to their mother helping to serve plates. Gilberto thought, "If there ever was a picture, next to the definition of 'home' in the dictionary, this would be it."

—Juan Carmona

## NOBODY HOME

Edwin walked home from middle school. It was cloudy, but a threatening humidity hung in the air, making him sweat through his jeans. The Gulf brought a thick stifling breeze, not the kind that makes the heat tolerable, but the kind that just pushes the hot air around, spreading the stink that rises from the pits and the crotch of all the unfortunate who walk home in the afternoon. Edwin was used to it though. He had grown up in the Valley. Sweating was a natural thing.

He always thought of his dad when he walked home. He wondered about him, making him up in his head as he put one foot in front of the other, on the cracked and dilapidated sidewalks that led him home. He made up a new dad every time he walked. He often had to stay after school for tutoring, or detention and would miss the bus, so there were a lot of lonely walks and a lot of different dads. Sometimes his dad would be a lawyer, driving a shiny, black BMW. He would pull up right beside Edwin, and the passenger window would roll down, “Need a ride son?” He would take Edwin out to lunch, where ever he wanted to eat. Sometimes his dad was a construction worker and would pull up in a big raised up F-150 with dried dirt caked on the tires. Edwin’s mother said his dad was a bum, and was probably in jail, and he shouldn’t waste time wondering about him.

Edwin and his mother lived in a one-bedroom, in a part of town where if you didn’t lock your doors you deserved to be robbed or worse. As he approached the familiar façade of the apartment building, he cringed when he saw his mother’s underthings hanging over the side of the balcony, taunting him. Some of the guys at school would give him shit about his mother’s underthings. In the locker room, Eli Maldonado would always talk shit. “Hey, Edwin, tell your mom to put her chones away. Huele como panocha acá afuera.” All the guys would laugh their asses off. Edwin couldn’t do anything because Eli was a lot taller than him, he was good at basketball, and would probably kick his ass. Supposedly he had screwed three chicks at his school, and was dating a high school girl.

Edwin told his mom that if she didn’t stop hanging her underwear outside, he was going to throw all her clothes over the side of the balcony for the stray dogs and tlacuaches to tear up. She ignored his threats and continued to hang her underthings outside. Edwin didn’t have the courage to toss them over the balcony. He stomped up the cement stairs, the wrought-iron railing reverberating with every one of his angry footfalls.

“¡Amá!” he yelled as he forced the key into the difficult lock. “What did I tell you about hanging your chones on the balcony?”

His mother was at work. She usually was home from the hospital, where she worked in the cafeteria, for a few minutes before she had to go to the motel where she worked late nights as a chamber maid. He cursed under his breath, as he slid open the glass door to the balcony. He stared at his mother's wet underthings with disgust, stains telling a history of her cycles and mishaps. He hated those pieces of clothing. He yanked them from the railing, one of the waist bands catching and ripping loudly. He continued bundling the thin, damp fabric in the crook of his left arm.

"Stupid old bitch. I already told her, the whole damn neighborhood seeing her nasty shit." Edwin collected the underwear to take down to the laundry room his mother was too cheap to pay for. Edwin hurried out of the apartment, banging his elbow as he slammed the door shut. He stomped down the stairs, almost crashing into Mrs. Montemayor.

"¡Aiiiii, hijo! ¡Asustaste!" The old woman's wrinkles were dry, deep cuts that would never heal. Her eyes so wide, the wrinkles disappeared for that moment when she was scared. She looked so different when she was scared, like another person, younger even.

"Sorry, Mrs. Montemayor." She laughed at her own silliness, the wrinkles coming back now. Edwin very badly wanted to inch past her on the stairs. She was a short heavy set woman, so it took some maneuvering from the both of them, but not before the old woman from Chiapas could eye the underwear in Edwin's arms. Mrs. Montemayor began to ask Edwin about his mom, often times Edwin knew his mother was home when he heard the two women hashing out the day in their native dialect on the landing outside their door. Sometimes it could go on for almost an hour. It always concluded with "Bueno, bye." and then the key would slide into the lock and the bolt would squeak before it clicked. This always made Edwin kind of jump and stop what he was doing, even though he was expecting it.

Edwin fumbled with the underwear and turned red, as he squeezed past saying, "Bye, take care." and finished stomping down the rest of the concrete steps. Edwin stumbled on one of the loose stones that made up the path to the laundry room, dropping some of the clothing. As Edwin was picking up his mother's things from the dusty walk, the sky grew dark. Thick, grey clouds ate up the sun. The hot air swirled up nothing but dirt, stinging Edwin's eyes. He clenched them shut as the wind pummeled him with dust. The Gulf often made these threats, as if to make itself known, reminding the border that it belonged to the murky waters that crashed upon its shores.

When he got to the laundry room, he slowly inched in. No sounds of laughter or spray paint cans. He was glad to see it was empty. Eli and the other guys from the neighborhood would sometimes practice tagging on the walls, and he didn't want to be seen with his arms full of his mother's chones. He found an open dryer, and began tossing the damp clothes in. He finished putting all the underthings into the dryer, and reached in his pocket for quarters, but his pockets were empty. He rushed upstairs to the little turtle bowl where they kept all the spare change, cursing his mother all way up the stairs, the wrought iron rails singing with the vibrations of his frustration.

As he entered the apartment, he went for the turtle bowl on the kitchen counter. It was empty. "Shit." He went through some of the pockets of his jeans he had, draped on the futon where he slept in the living room. They were empty. "Dammit." He went to his mother's room. He felt something wrong even before he went into the bedroom. A man stepped out into the hallway casually, as if he was just stepping out of his own bedroom. He was dark, and lean. He looked hard, as if carved out of driftwood; he seemed to be tensing all his muscles at once. He eyed Edwin carefully, holding Edwin's disc-man in one hand; he stuffed something gold in his pocket with the other, looking Edwin up and down.

"Who're you?" Edwin asked.

"¿Yo? Nadie." The man said, sliding the disc-man into his denim jacket. His nails were dirty, black underneath. He had the shadow of a beard that disappeared somewhere around his neck. They both just stood there eyeing each other. The man stood, arms out at his sides, leaning on his right leg, like he was ready for something. Edwin reflected his stance.

"¿Tienes un problema?" the man asked as he looked Edwin up and down. Edwin just shook his head, avoiding the man's eyes. He walked pass Edwin, and out the front door, leaving it open as he stomped down the stairs. Edwin peeked outside the door and down the steps. He was gone.

He closed the door with shaking hands, clicked the bolt lock and slid the chain. He looked in his mother's bedroom. All the drawers had been overturned, and her jewelry box was empty on the bed. The smell of stale cigarette smoke and body odor hung in the air, another unwanted guest. Tears formed in the corners of his eyes and he furiously wiped them away. He threw his mother's jewelry box in the corner of the room. He thought about calling the police, but no one in his neighborhood ever did. *That son of a bitch! How could he just come in here and take our shit?* He couldn't believe he let him walk out of here. He went into the

kitchen and made a sandwich. It had no taste. Edwin felt like he wanted to punch through the wall, through the brick on the outside, and reach out and grab the pendejo that was walking away with their stuff. He was pretty sure he had seen the guy before, probably around the neighborhood. Edwin spent the next hour laying on the futon, listening to the thunder threatening the whole region. He imagined what he would do if he ran into the man again, what he would say, how he would punch him, knock him to the ground and rob him. He hopes he will see him again.

When Edwin went back down to the laundry room to get his mother's things, they were gone. He checked the other dryers and they were empty. He went back outside. It was raining so hard he could feel the raindrops deep, all the way to the bone.

—Derek Beltrán