

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

ScholarWorks @ UTRGV

Theses and Dissertations

5-2020

Espejismo: Imagen En Poemas

Mariela Cedillo

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/etd>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cedillo, Mariela, "Espejismo: Imagen En Poemas" (2020). *Theses and Dissertations*. 433.
<https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/etd/433>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. For more information, please contact justin.white@utrgv.edu, william.flores01@utrgv.edu.

ESPEJISMO: IMAGEN EN POEMAS

A Thesis

by

MARIELA CEDILLO

Submitted to the Graduate College of
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

May 2020

Major Subject: Creative Writing

ESPEJISMO: IMAGEN EN POEMAS

A Thesis
by
MARIELA CEDILLO

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Emmy Pérez
Chair of Committee

Dr. Cathryn Merla-Watson
Committee Member

Dr. José Rodríguez
Committee Member

May 2020

Copyright 2020 Mariela Cedillo

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

Cedillo, Mariela, Espejismo: Imagen de Poemas. Master of Fine Arts (MFA), May 2020, 90pp., references, 22 titles.

Espejismo: Imagen en Poemas is a collection of poetry that explores the idea that art – creating poetry can heal trauma wounds. This collection not only tackles the trauma of sexual assault, but the effects of mental health and its recovery. It is meant to portray a full story of womanhood, and all that that embodies. This collection explores these topics through the lens of personal narrative and experience through various poetry forms.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the ones who have to re-learn to use their tongues, their words, and bodies. To those who tuck secrets behind their ribs. To lovers. To those who struggle to share their truth. Please know, it is valid.

To my loved ones for all the love and support they have shown me throughout this journey. Especialmente, a mi madre Maria Estela por su aliento y fe inquebrantable. Mami, no podria haber hecho esto sin ti. Te quiero.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you, to my thesis chair Emmy Pérez for all of your advice, for igniting in me a love for poetry. I am forever grateful for your continuous support and encouragement throughout this journey. To Cathryn Merla-Watson and Jose Rodriguez, thank you for your time and your patience, for joining me on this journey, and all the lessons I'll carry with me from your courses.

I appreciate all the love and support that my family and friends have given me. Gracias, for always allowing me to rant, for your positive influence, and the many times you let me bounce ideas off of you all. Y, por supuesto, por las tazas de café, té y piezas de pan dulce.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATON.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
CHAPTER I. A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION.....	1
I. Movements of Influence: Confessional Poetry, Testimonio and onto the Now.....	3
II. Re – Claiming A Torn Tongue.....	14
III. The Seven Stages of Conocimiento, Writing To Heal.....	18
IV. Writing about Love and the Body and All of the Rest.....	25
V. Conclusion.....	28
CHAPTER II. A PRIMER VISTA.....	29
detras de las apareiencias.....	30
CHAPTER III. LOS SECRETOS INCRUSTADOS EN LA SANGRE.....	31
sangre aullando.....	32
the thing.....	34
rezando el padre nuestro.....	35
batalla de mente y cuerpo.	36
en el cementerio.....	37

exorcising a demon: a prologue.....	39
jukebox of memory unfiltered.	40
i. <i>todos cargamos la herencia de nuestra familia, quieramos o no</i>	41
herencia de una madre.....	42
los silencios de mi abuelo.	45
mi abuelo tano.....	47
is it apathy?	49
frustracion familiar.....	51
CHAPTER IV. MOMENTOS EN EL TIEMPO.....	54
el aleteo de una mariposa.....	55
CHAPTER V. LAS DESAPARECIDAS: AMOR, CORDURA E IGUALDAD.....	56
j10'92.....	57
i. <i>piel y sangre</i>	58
word problems about depression.....	59
1 0 0.....	61
on the precipice.....	62
when i think about killing myself.....	64
camas en cuartos ajenos.....	65
deja que frida te diga de nuestro amante favorito.....	67
ii. <i>en el espejo</i>	70
gaea in mourning.....	71

	gorda. peluda. prieta.	73
	#shepersists.....	74
	locked doors.....	76
iii.	<i>amor</i>	77
	creando sanctuarios.....	78
	mole y arroz.....	80
	hungry.....	81
	rose colored visions.	82
	de corazon a corazon.....	83
	a home aubade.....	84
	soledad.....	85
	CHAPTER VI: AL FINAL QUE ENCONTRASTE.....	86
	terminacion. ¿ahora que?.....	87
	REFERENCES.....	88
	BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	90

CHAPTER 1

A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of my MFA degree began as an inkling when I was in middle school. It sprung out of my deep appreciation for young adult fiction. The genre was the inspiration, what I once thought I'd present as my final project of my MFA journey. That all changed a semester into the MFA program. As part of my coursework I took several workshops in several genres, and I began to stray further into the poetry courses. It was where the words flowed naturally, not without difficulty, but with a rightness I hadn't experienced until then. So, when this project began to form itself, I was sure that poetry was the direction I wanted to go with. Most of the subjects of this project were ones that I didn't want to write about, some inspired by prompts and others simply fought to be written. Along the way I found that I was battling myself when I wrote, because I kept spilling events and stories onto the page that I didn't want to share. I fought it continuously, until I realized that in order for me to move forward, I had to pursue that thread, which has led me to this poetry collection, *Espejismo, Imagen de Poemas*.

Much of what is covered in this collection is influenced by the experiences of my family and myself. With the help of various movements like testimonio and confessional poetry I bring from the margins and my memories the secrets and silence I've been carrying for many years now. Some that are my own, and others that I've picked up from the women

around me. The fact that these stories were influenced by women is important because this collective work is overall a story of womanhood. One that is attempting to shed the shame of secrecy and is littered with the effects of trauma on the body, the mind, and the soul.

In this poetry, I attempt to explore a history of domestic violence, sexual assault, mental health, and the ways in which it is passed down through generations. It is not meant to be the main focus of this work though it is heavily covered throughout it. Much of it is influenced by my own experiences, and those of my family. Our lives have been touched by violence at the hands of those we've trusted at different stages of our lives. I've contemplated that it almost seems as though it is an heirloom being passed from one generation to the next. One that isn't unique to my family, to myself as a woman. Much of my poetry explores the different perspectives that this history has touched. From my own history of sexual assault at the hands of a family member, to the effects my late father's alcoholic and violent nature had on our family as a whole. That history is at the nexus – the center of this poetry, but it spreads out – to the trauma and its effects – such as suppressed memories, depression, and anxiety. The personal has heavily influenced this work, but it is my hope that it contributes to a larger conversation. The work covers these subjects through poetry in the best way that I've been able to work through it by not only doing the emotional work but also by employing the skills taught to me about the forms, genres, and modes of poetry that I am placing my work in.

Writing about my trauma, my mental health, was never a part of my project, but the more I worked on it, the more the poetry circled around to it. Along the way, I encountered authors that touched upon the same themes, other woman choices that had found their poetic voices to confess or testify their truth. Writers like Erika Sánchez, Rachel McKibben's, and Michelle Otero are just some of the voices that have inspired and influenced my work. For they were and

are writing on the topics that my Mexican American culture and the societal expectations around me told me were considered taboo. Others like Gloria Anzaldúa, have influenced the theories behind my work, ones that speak of the bond between the academic and the spirit. I didn't want for this project to only reflect the things that I couldn't help but write about – if I had to write about it then I wanted to create a full picture. These individual poems I envision as stained-glass pieces that come together to form a full image, one that when the light hits it - when it is read, might reflect a full mosaic. To achieve that I endeavored to write about all the excess, which in this case was about body image, love, and feminism.

Through several sections I do my best to explore the different aspects of this poetry collection. The first section explores what it means to write in the space between testimonio and confessional poetry. I aim to explore why it is that I recognize aspects of both in my work but cannot allow them to rest in either one. The second will be about re-claiming a language in order to gain control in telling truthful, honest narratives. I explore the relationship between the Spanish language and myself. The ways in which it was stolen from me and how I re-claimed it. The third will explore new stages of being, of creating, and gaining knowledge, as well as exploring if one can create art and heal our trauma with it. I attempt to answer some of the questions I've asked myself continuously through this entire project. In the fourth section I talk about love, the body, and spirit of womanhood.

Movements of Influence: Confessional Poetry, Testimonio and onto the Now

Testimonio and confessional poetry have been movements of writing that have given women as writers spaces to share work that often times is forgotten in the margins or is considered too private. I recognize the ways in which they have opened creative paths

throughout the decades for women writers. In turn, the authors that they indirectly or directly influenced have allowed me to join those spaces. Giving me the confidence and space to share my stories – my art.

Confessional poetry sprung from a particular group of poets that were writing during the 1950's and 1960's, such as Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and Robert Lowell. The *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* credits M.L. Rosenthal as the originator of the confessional poetry term. Rosenbaum described confessional poetry, that it “employed the first-person voice to explore transgressive autobiographical subjects including mental illness, familial trauma, gender and sexuality, and moral and political iconoclasm” (Rosenbaum). He looked at the work they were doing and termed it confessional poetry due to their personal nature. One of the trailblazers for the movement, author Anne Sexton wrote poetry aspects of feminism, whether it was about the roles women were expected to take or topics that were often kept private – like suicide. She was taking private matters and making them public, which was often discouraged. Confessional is a term that was given to many authors because of the personal nature of their work, but it's not clear if they liked the term confessional poet. More contemporary poets like Kim Addonizio find that to be labeled as a confessional poet is limiting and gives a false assumption of the things covered in their poetry. Her work has been called confessional because it is based on things that have happened to her, yet the label is a term she's not sure fits well. In an interview for *The Guardian* when asked about being considered as a confessional poet she said she found it to be a curse because her work, though autobiographical at times, is not fully based on factual truth. She changes the experiences that shape her work – at times she straight out lies, leaving the confessional label to be unfit. She touches upon the many ways she's played with the truth: “I killed my mother before she died,” and then offers another example, “my heart

is not a Mississippi chicken shack” (Dean, “Kim Addonizio: It’s a curse to say that somebody is confessional”). The personal is not meant to be confessional. I find that I too have an issue with the label, not the movement itself. The movement has allowed writers to feel free to write about personal narratives, or often shut away subjects. But the label of “confessional” is stifling by giving the assumption that the events being shared are 100% factually true. Looking at my work at the end of this project, I recognize “confessional” aspects of it, but like Addonizio I wouldn’t label my work confessional. It is influenced by personal experiences, but the beauty of it being poetry is that I could take the facts and shift them in order to highlight whatever point or narrative was being shared. I didn’t consider labels or specific writing movements when I was creating this project, even if unknowingly I was participating in them. But now that I reflect on it, and I look at these movements I can recognize and acknowledge that they paved the path for myself and other writers.

Authors that I was inspired by, were in turn inspired by some of the trailblazers of this confessional poetry movement. Anne Sexton’s poetry decades later offered a kinship to some of the authors that inspired me. Rachel McKibben’s in a 2013 TEDx talk discusses the influence that Sexton’s poem “Wanting to Die” had on her as a poet. Sexton’s stanza in “Wanting to Die”, “But suicides have a special language. / Like carpenters they want to know which tools. / They never ask why build” (7-9) allowed McKibben’s to feel a kinship in Sexton because she had found a voice that matched her own. She says, “I read that line over and over like it was prayer, until my body was filled with electricity that one gets when one recognizes yourself in another. Finally, someone who was fluent in this wicked language I spoke” (“Poetry as Therapy: Rachel McKibbens,” 00:02:32 – 00:02:50). I also found that kinship in McKibben’s work. In her book

blud there is a poem titled “maybe this will explain my taste in men,” the narrator speaks of a violent dynamic between themselves and their father:

When Dad busted my face open
I got to stay home from
school, watched cartoons
all day like a goddamn king. (Stanza 1)

The narrator acknowledges the violent nature of their relationship, but there is an underlining understanding of affection – even if it is violent affection. Their dynamics are unbalanced and imply that the narrator is around inappropriate behavior:

I peeped through the blinds
with my own good eye, saw
a blonde in a nurse’s uniform.

Dad opened the door & howled
as she sang him a high-pitched
song, bending at the waist
to show off her tits. (Stanzas 5 -6)

That poem’s bluntness – the narrator’s awareness of their surroundings and situation inspired me to attempt to embody that boldness in my own work. I wanted to write something where I didn’t attempt to hide or brush off the darker aspects of my narrator’s relationship with their aggressor – their father. That resulted in the poems “the thing” and “rezando el padre nuestro” where I did my best to achieve that by including lines that made clear the dynamic of their relationship. In “the thing” I write:

You were only nine, you can smell – Bud Light and cigarette smoke, you taste ash with every breath, hear the belt buckle – the ding as it is loosened, the door was open – the hallway light on. Afterwards he rolled over – said your mother’s name.

The narrator is re-calling an assault at the hands of their father. I struggled with those particular lines because I didn’t know how much as a writer, I could distance myself from the subject, and how much I wanted the narrator to reveal. That was also a challenging aspect, because I continuously asked myself, how much am I willing to reveal? How many secrets am I shedding? How many silences am I breaking?

Writing about secrets, about silences is not something new, especially not for women of color. As the confessional poetry movement was happening and continued to move forward so was one of testimonio in the United States by women of color that was influenced by the testimonio movement in Latin America. This movement can be traced back to the 1970’s as a literary mode and understood as a form of writing that allows marginalized people – often people of color – an approach to fight back against the established narrative that considers them and their perspectives unimportant. Testimonio takes many forms but is ultimately both an oral and written account of witness. Its goal is to bring to light a wrong, a point of view, or urgent call to action. Chicana scholars embraced testimonio because it gave them power and control over the narratives about them that went out into the world and their communities. In “*Testimonio: Origins, Terms, and Resources*,” testimonio is usually described as being an account of one person but, “represents the voice of many whose lives have been affected by particular social events, such as totalitarian governments, war violence, displacement, or other types of broad social affronts on humanity” (Reyes and Curry Rodriguez 528). The writers of the Latina Feminist Group took on testimonio in the 1990’s and early 2000’s influenced by this work of

testimonio in Latin America. They defined testimonio traditionally in their anthology *Telling to Live Latina Feminist Testimonios* as “... a crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure” (Latina Feminist Group 2). Testimonio is then an area, a place where one can explore the areas of gray within the established narrative by sharing the stories of others that have not been recorded or considered important enough to note. In the 70’s and 80’s writers like Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa were had already been working through testimonio, picking up in the United States what testimonio was already doing in Latin America. Their anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, originally published in 1981, is a collective work of prose and poetry. The narratives in the book were those of women of color who were not often published in mainstream literary circles, often on the outer margins of what was considered mainstream stories of womanhood by mostly white women authors. The women that contributed to *This Bridge Called My Back* shared their experiences sin pelos en la lengua. By writing, by sharing their experiences they shed the weight of secrets and silences.

In “Dreams of Violence” a short recollection by Naomi Littlebear Morena the narrator recalls acts of violence by boys and men, and her grandmother and the trauma that that leaves someone with. I find “Dreams of Violence” an example of breaking a silence or secret because the narrator by revealing the violence at the hands of a family member is breaking one of the unwritten rules that families have – particularly families of color. I understood and saw it as an act of power. Yet, by taking that power one can also open themselves up to confrontation or the constant reminder of that violence. Littlebear Moreno ends her re-collection by stating, “We both have no choice but to be survivors though the fears are still there” (Littlebear Morena 15). One

cannot cease to live – survive a trauma because of a fear. A step forward must always be made no matter how terrifying.

The Latina Feminist Group in their anthology *Telling to Live* re-defined testimonio and the ways of sharing experiences, breaking secrets and silences. What they called their *papelitos guardados* were meant to be acts of empowerment:

Sharing can begin a process of empowerment. Stepping out of the roles expected of Latina women in the academy and in our communities, we bring to life our *papeles* and render out *testimonios* through autobiographical narratives, short stories, poems, and dialogues. (Latina Feminist Group 1)

To begin this way of empowerment, they redefined testimonio, shifted it from an act of retelling someone else's narrative to the act of sharing their own experiences in order to acknowledge their own truths. This act of telling the truth in order to acknowledge it, in order for it to exist outside of memories and thoughts is one that I was participating in unknowingly. For when I wrote my own work I wasn't familiar with these women's work, with the ways in which their movement had opened a path for my own in the future. I find a kinship with them, with the fact that they gave their emotional truth a narrative. It is what I am attempting to do. I can recognize the ways in which their work and my own navigate the conversations of truth. At the beginning of this poetry collection, I wouldn't call my work a form of testimonio – just as I couldn't call it confessional. And I still don't, but I can acknowledge the ways in which their writing movements have allowed my work to stand on its own. Testimonio is a call to action, of change. I don't believe that that is what I am doing with this poetry collection, at least I didn't set out to. I can recognize aspects of it within the work, but I don't think I'm quite there yet.

In this work that I've put together, I am attempting to navigate through secrets, silences, and what is the truth as the writer through the narrator. I was inspired and influenced through that by prose pieces in *Telling to Live* and the poetry of Erika L. Sánchez's in her book *Lessons on Expulsion*. I read "Telling to Live: Devoro la Mentira, Resucitando Mi Ser" by Inés Hernández Avila which dealt with the narrator's experiences of molestation, abuse, and violence. What struck me the most of this chapter was the narrator's way of addressing what they had gone through and then not keeping silent over what had been done to them. How the act of silence is one of control and domination by the cultural conditioning that women receive (Hernández Avila 299). She writes that they:

dictates to us the need to keep appearances, to not let anyone know of the abuse. To break the silence makes the family look bad. To admit the shattered foundations makes the community look bad. To call attention to the internal contradictions makes the social organization look bad. Better to pretend that all is well. Better to fabricate a unified front. Better to lie. (Hernández Avila 299)

To break a silence, to reveal an ugly truth – one that affects a community or family at large is challenging and risky. I debated too many times whether what I was doing – writing would do harm than good. I asked myself, will they call me liar? Will they scrape my name off the family tree? Will I cease to exist? But breaking that silence, revealing those secrets, is not an act of aggression or revenge. I have a handful of poems in this collection that reveal truths about myself, my family, and some very traumatic moments. In these poems is where I break my silence and claim my truth. In "Rezando El Padre Nuestro" I wrote:

Padre nuestro que estas en el cielo santificado sea tu nombre.

Te ruego - look down upon this daughter.
Her glazed eyes, searching for you in the crevices.

Noises bitten off – inarticulate, her tongue gone – torn off.

Hágase tu voluntad así en la tierra como en el cielo.

Prove to her - this cannot be for you - from you.

Stop his heart - his hands.

Let the phone ring - an alarm sound.

Through this poem I tried to achieve two things. I wanted the narrator to take an act of comfort – like praying and warp it, to turn it into a plea, a cry for help. My intention behind that was that the narrator despite holding that secret – that silence within themselves is with the spirit constantly reaching out to break the silence, shed the secret and all that comes with it. In the process of writing about these things – the subjects I had done my best to avoid. I confronted myself a lot as a writer, but also my narrator because they had to reveal the nexus – the abuse, and then confront the effects of it – the trauma. This was the mental health issues – depression, and anxiety that the narrator has been dealing with for over a decade. It is where I found a kinship with Erika L. Sánchez’s poetry. In an interview with *Porter House Review* in reference to poetry as an act of witness she says, “I think poetry is a place to be incredibly honest, and whether that honesty or that truth is pretty or not, it’s what’s most important to me” (Ellison, “The Truth of Beauty: An Interview with Erika Sánchez”). I wanted to be truthful, honest, not so that anyone else could claim responsibility or carry all of this now for me, but for it to no longer weigh me down. Poet Diana Marie Delgado in an interview for The PEN Ten when asked about navigating the truth in her work said that there was no answer to that question, because if she did then it would no longer be true. Delgado says that ultimately, “What I can say is that I told a truth in my book, and that I used aspects of fiction not traditionally used in poetry to tell the “story” of that truth” (Meissner, “The PEN Ten: An Interview with Diana Marie Delgado”). It is what I was trying to do – any truths that I claim in this work, that I share are mine. They are a

truth I had to share for myself. So in the spirit of truthfulness and honesty I wrote about my depression, and anxiety. I gave my narrator the power to talk about it in the most honest way I could do so. In Sanchez's *Lessons of Expulsion*, poems like "The Poet at Fifteen" have the narrator remembering herself at a younger age, at the ways in which she was dealing with her own depression. The poem reads:

White dresses
like Emily Dickinson.

I dreaded that first Robin,
so, at fifteen you slash
your wrists.

You're not allowed
to shave your legs at the hospital.

The atmosphere
that year: sometimes you exist
and sometimes you think you're Mrs. Dalloway.

This is bold – existing. (Sánchez 40)

The narrator sounds as though they are longing for or seem intrigued by death. As though they are exhausted by the act of living – by whatever it is that might be plaguing them. I tried to emulate that in my own work. I wrote several pieces on my own experiences with

depression, and the narrator whose voice carries these poems contemplates suicide several times, conflicted over the ways of that their mental illnesses weigh heavily on their day by day. In these poems the narrator was able to explore the effects of mental illness as a result of trauma. They are able to narratively explore the darker aspects of it, like the narrator's suicidal thoughts. Through poetry and with the use of imagery and language to navigate it in a safe medium. In the poem, "sangre aullando" the narrator is thinking about suicide as they drive around their neighborhood:

I drive around them, stop sign to stop sign aimless.

The howls are still echoing – a crescendo in tune with my pulse.

I brake and roll to a stop - the other me,
perhaps the braver me - wraps her car around the nearest pole.

In others like, "On the Precipice" the narrator is not contemplating suicide, but more like their own strength. They are in a state of isolation and thinking on what that can lead to if they are not in control – or strong enough as she avoid her mother's phone call:

A red number 1 claims a not – yet – listened to – voicemail

her mother's voice, "Mija, nomas te hablaba para ver como te fue hoy.

Ala major ya estas dormida. Mañana hablamos – love you."

In the resting silence she plays it again.

"Mija . . . mañana hablamos . . ."

Tomorrow feels daunting – desired but vague.

Will she rise in the middle of the night

chest too tight – the sadness too strong

for the pills – the weekly counseling
the self-care techniques – will tonight be
the night they exhaust themselves?

Will she give in?

Tear open the scabs, her chipped
nails sickly with her own blood.

Or will it be tomorrow

My pieces were inspired and influenced by the work of McKibbens and Sánchez. I am able to step into these spaces with them, to find a kinship with them. Writers like Anne Sexton, Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Rachel McKibben's, Erika. L. Sanchez, and all the women of the Latina Feminist Group have paved the way so that women – women of color like me can use our voices, claim our experiences, and truths. Through my own work I do my best to shine light on the shadows that have plagued my own life, in the hope that they will be able to allow myself as the writer to navigate truth, trauma, and emotion, as well as whoever might read it and see part of themselves in these pieces realize they are not alone.

Re-Claiming A Torn Tongue

Much of the work in this collection touches upon a personal narrative that involves trauma and the effects it has on the body, the mind, and the spirit. Just as the work centers on these subjects, it simultaneously explores the act of healing through creation – through writing and what it means to embody new ways of knowledge and acts of healing. First, before I can reclaim the body, the knowledge to create, I must re-claim my tongue. The Spanish tongue that's been jaggedly severed by societal and familial expectations. This reclaiming not only allows me

to engage with my Spanish tongue but to heal from the trauma it has been subjected to. I grew up in the Rio Grande Valley, five minutes away from Mexico. I was surrounded by Spanish, whether it was my family or strangers. It was a language that felt safe, that tied me to the network of people around me. I strayed from it when it triggered my trauma, when I felt isolated from those around me. Spanish became something that I didn't want to associate myself with.

This act of reclaiming brings my tongue back together, where I not only open myself to hearing the language but to engaging with it. It is why throughout this project I tried my best to re-familiarize myself with it, to close the gap that I had purposely put between the language and myself by writing poems entirely in Spanish, by incorporating it into the poems so that it could reflect the ways in which I speak when I'm unguarded. Usually, that means I code switch a lot when I'm speaking, a mixture of English and Tex-Mex Spanglish. My mother always gently teases me when I stumble on a word or phrase, though it is with her that I'm not afraid to stumble or mispronounce words the way I do when it's required of me at work, or with people who speak "proper Spanish." It is my way of taking something that felt torn away from me back in order to assert control, but also to begin healing from the traumas that are associated with it. My familiarity with Spanish was home grown – I didn't learn it academically. It is why in this poetry collection I've forgone the use of accent marks as well as why some spellings are more colloquial in nature. It is true to the ways that I am familiar to the language. I am still learning and taking the time to fill the gaps in my knowledge. For the sake of this project though, I thought it best to have the Spanish in use reflect the honesty of my knowledge of its rules and structure. That in itself is an act of re-claiming for I refuse to be restrained by las reglas de academia. Though it may change as I continue to learn, by once more embracing my mother

tongue I know that it will unfurl off my tongue and through my fingers always in sync with who I am.

Re-claiming my Spanish tongue was vital to this work. I needed it so that I could create and begin my road to healing. I had bit off my Spanish tongue in small pieces, suppressing my truth, my voice due to the expectations of my immediate society and familial culture. Gloria Anzaldúa wrote about overcoming the tradition of silence, the passed down laws of the Spanish language in regard to Chicanx/Latina women. In *Borderlands La Frontera* Anzaldúa writes in the chapter “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” that “*Ser habladora* was to be a gossip and a liar, to talk too much. *Muchachitas bien criadas*, well-bred girls don’t answer back” (Anzaldúa 76). Women in her time were not meant to have a voice, to have authority. She continues, “I remember one of the sins I’d recite to the priest in the confession box the few times I went to confession: talking back to my mother, *hablar pa’tras*, *repelar*. *Hocicon*, *repelona*, *chismosa*, having a big mouth, questioning, carrying tales are all signs of being *mal criada*” (Anzaldúa 76). Accusatory words with negative connotations are often used to describe women while refraining from being applied to men. The Spanish language is then coded to function for men, for their benefit and power. My relationship with Spanish felt familiar to Anzaldúa’s even though I grew up in the RGV decades after she did because when I did engage with the language, I was speaking with a shortened tongue. One that lost syllables and often resulted in jagged edged words that were laced with more aggression than I understood. Now I am claiming back that power with the use of Spanish in my work, re-claiming a voice lost to me by abuse and shame. I’ve got a handle on the aggression, smoothed the jagged edges of my words, let my tongue re-grow. When I titled this collection in Spanish, when I wrote entire poems in Spanish, when I let my Tex Mex Spanglish tongue unfurl onto the paper I took back the narrative, the voice that was

cut off. It made the voice of the narrator stronger. It is also where I am unfiltered, my wagging tongue that's been stitched back together is untamed and unfurls from behind my teeth. This unfiltered tongue has influenced some of my pieces like "Frustracion Familiar," where the Spanish is at play in order to convey an unfiltered frustration at a familial situation:

Ustedes, que a escondidas como chachalacas,
Juzgan con los brazos cruzados
Dan sus opiniones con los culos pegados al asiento.

Envidian por envidiar,
Llenos de orgullo y coraje,
Pero no asumen responsabilidad.

In that piece my re-newed relationship with Spanish allow my narrator to take power back and to express a sentiment. In other pieces it is a tool of truth and honesty beyond what's been expressed. This is the case with pieces like, "Los Silencios de mi Abuelo," where the narrator touches upon the way that he was the only man in her childhood that the narrator felt safe around, "El era el unico que me hacia sentir a salvo en ese apartamento." In "La Soledad De Un Alma," the narrator speaks entirely in Spanish as well in order to speak to an unknown lover they have yet to meet:

en esos momentos extraño el timbre de tu
voz, cuando el frio me envuelve,
y las sabanas no son suficiente,
ni las pijamas - extraño el calor de tu cuerpo,
cuando no se darle significado a mis
palabras, a mis pensamientos – mas que un
te extraño,
a ti lo que sospecho es la otra parte de mi
alma.
A ti que eres nada mas que un sueño.

Re-familiarizing myself with Spanish, engaging with it outside of the safe spaces I had kept it confined to allowed me to give this collection an element of honesty that I'm not sure I would have been able to give without it. Even now I struggle to embody it in this introduction. Just as Spanish is a tool for me to be more honest, to share the truth more freely, so is the state where poetry is written. They are like building blocks, working in tandem and helping me as a writer to push past the trauma and clear a path for healing.

The Seven Stages of Conocimiento, Writing to Heal

The seven stages of conocimiento is a journey, a state of being that can happen all at once, in pieces, or is constantly shifting. Gloria Anzaldúa guides readers through the seven stages in her essay “now let us shift...the path of conocimiento... inner work, public acts.” It is where a new form of being, of knowledge can be found. Michelle Otero's concept in her book *Malinche's Daughter* and the essay “The Weight of the Word” that we can “write to heal our wounds” can work in tandem with the seven stages of conocimiento. Otero developed her concept during her time working with survivors of sexual assault in Oaxaca. As a Fulbright Fellow she was giving writing workshops to the women there – *Malinche's Daughter* is a memoir about that experience along with her own trauma.

The seven stages allow someone to take their most painful experiences and transform them into something valuable, something that is meant to be shared in order to empower others. Anzaldúa claims one has to travel through the road of conocimiento:

Tu camino de conocimiento requires that you encounter your shadow side and confront what you've programmed yourself (and have been programmed by your cultures) to

avoid (desconocer), to confront the traits and habits distorting how you see reality and inhibiting the full use of your facultades. (Anzaldúa 540-541)

She encourages us to face head on what we've avoided, what we have been told to not look at and travel through it by embracing all of our bodily and spiritual senses to gain a new understanding. Several of the pieces in my poetry are experiencing a stage of *conocimiento* or several of them all at once. Even the sections themselves go through the stages of *conocimiento*: Section III. *Los Secretos Incrustados En La Sangre* contains poems that travel through the first three stages, *el arrebatado*, *nepantla*, and *the Coatlicue state*. Because the narrator is confronting the *susto*, the shock that leaves her separate from her body, her soul, and it leaves her on unsteady ground (Anzaldúa 546). "Sangre Aullando" is the one that I believe best embodies the state of *arrebatado*, the narrator is trying to navigate through the dissociation she feels in relation to the traumatic event. The state of *nepantla* follows, where the narrator is suspended in a transitional space, between what was and what comes next. Though the overwhelming state of being between the before and after can cause a break down. (Anzaldúa 548) It sends the narrator into the third stage, the *Coatlicue state*. One where the narrator without the safety of the familiar, separated from their body, their soul, is then left dysfunctional and falls into despair and hopelessness so deep it leaves them at times paralyzed (Anzaldúa 550). The narrator from "The Thing" and "Rezando El Padre Nuestro" I'd say is in the state of *coatlicue*. She is living with the effects of her trauma – in "The Thing" she lives with her hopelessness right underneath the surface:

The Thing is, you stapled the wound without disinfecting it. In the bursts of anger – slammed doors. Hot tears that burned your cheeks, too sensitive they whispered. It allowed The Thing to remain - infected - left to fester with scabs and oozing puss. You never let it heal, always afraid someone might see the cause – the proof of what you had allowed.

In the poem “Rezando El Padre Nuestro” the narrator is also in the Coatlicue state of *conocimiento*, though at a younger stage. She is at that moment seeking guidance – absolution because her mind and body are in a state of despair – feeling alone:

Padre nuestro que estas en el cielo santificado sea tu nombre.

Te ruego - look down upon this daughter.
Her glazed eyes, searching for you in the crevices.

Noises bitten off – inarticulate, her tongue gone – torn off.

Hágase tu voluntad así en la tierra como en el cielo.

Prove to her - this cannot be for you - from you. Stop his heart - his hands.
Let the phone ring - an alarm sound.

The next four stages are meant to propel the narrator forward, past the fear, the unknown and the hopelessness. At times, these pieces reach the seventh stage, but no matter where they land on the seven stages, they are all a form of creation and new understanding. So, if there is a new understanding that has brought forth art, then is it healing? Michelle Otero’s theory in *Malinche’s Daughter* “that we write to heal our wounds” (26-27) joins the stages of *conocimiento*, yet the act of creating, of writing to heal is not guaranteed. Not to this narrator, to me as the writer.

In *Malinche’s Daughter*, Otero is breaking the bonds of silence imposed upon her and other women who are survivors of sexual assault. By shedding the victim/víctima label and claiming one of survivor/sobreviviente because, “survivors is the correct word, for these are women who have suffered abuse but refuse to be defined by it, women who challenge the silence surrounding this subject” (Otero 5). Otero through the act of writing sheds her own victimhood, she writes to heal her trauma, to create from it and despite it, so that it cannot be denied, and silenced in order to keep the peace for her aggressor, while she as a character in the memoir

becomes a husk of herself, wasting away. Keeping the peace, living in silence, in a stage of oppression has repercussions, both emotionally and physically as Otero writes:

I heal that room, those words inside me as long as I could. The pressure of secrets burst through me. Bed-wetting through third grade. Handfuls of black hair trailing me in junior high. Migraines in senior year. Acne at Harvard...A face that hurt, almost asking the world not to touch me. I don't want to look at this. Nobody does. But here it is. We write to heal our wounds. (Otero 27)

The narrator is not only confronting the silence that's been shouldered onto her, but also traveling through her own stages of *conocimiento* to regain control, to know herself without the burden of being weighed down with secrets. It is Otero's belief, this writing to heal approach that is at the core of my poetry collection. I no longer wanted to drown beneath the weight of the secrets I was carrying - they were no longer being held back no matter how much I tried. Because as I would write, they'd spill themselves onto the paper even when I fought it. I'd scrap drafts and avoid writing because it was a constant spillage. But as Otero pointed out, no one wants to confront those secrets, when they involve a violent attack on the body, on the soul that leaves you struggling for years. If I wanted to stop drowning, killing myself over and over, then I had to confront it. So, I did, with the tool that I knew best, poetry. Yet, I struggle with the concept of writing to heal, because though I am tired of writing about it like Otero, of the trauma, and the constant drownings, I am still writing about it. It still bleeds onto my pages.

The continuous topic that I don't want to write about but continue to do so I've come to understand is the trauma that I am attempting to navigate through in this collection. Through the use of my narrator I recount the trauma – whether it is in the act of remembering it, the effects of it, or embodying it once again. A challenge I am not alone in. Upon the completion of this

project I found myself reflecting on it and the things that inspired me and drove me to complete it. Reflecting on the role of trauma and its place in this poetry collection I found other writers who have created poetry as a way to understand or work through their trauma. Lorna Dee Cervantes, in her poetry collection *Letters to David An Elegiac Mass in the form of a Train* is one such example. *Letters to David* is a poetry collection that reflects on both Robert F. Kennedy, to whom she addresses this collection to, and Cervante's confrontation with loss and violent imagery left with trauma. They both experienced the violent deaths of their parents. Kennedy saw his father assassinated on live television, Cervante's mother was raped and left to burn in her childhood home. As part of a collection of essays on the work of Cervantes, Sonia V. González writes in her essay "Narrating Traumatic Memories in *Letters to David*" that trauma survivors more times than not do not process a traumatic event as a conscious event, but rather as an emotional one. She says:

Since traumatic memories have no verbal script, they manifest themselves as intrusive images, nightmares, and flashbacks, and continue to haunt survivors until they are able to transform them into a "recital of the event." (González 156)

Those memories that are manifesting as sensory and visual information have to be made sense of, in a way translated. They are taken from symbolic manifestations of trauma to a narrative form. Cervantes and I'd say myself give our trauma a narrative form through poetry. Through that medium is where we as trauma survivors can decipher the emotional imprint of that trauma. At least that has been the case for me. I write poetry to take control of that emotional turmoil, to make sense of the things that trigger my trauma. One of the biggest challenges that came from that was that I thought if I wrote it all down, if I give it a physical place to be outside of my own mind and body, then I was taking a step forward in my healing process. I could then

leave it, refrain from spilling it unwillingly in my poetry the way that I felt I was, and still do if I'm being honest. But that in itself was something I recognized as I looked at Cervante's work at the end of this project. That I wasn't alone in that feeling, and that it is a fairly common thing within trauma survivors. In the "Eighth Station" poem of *Letters to David* Cervantes reflects on the day that David was found in his hotel room dead of an overdose. She reflects on the narrative that David's struggle with addictive substances was partly due to the fact that he was trying to forget his trauma. The poem addresses those ideas, that myth that people take drugs to forget.

Cervantes states:

what you
and I
together
understand
is they
don't know
shit
when they
say
you did it
to forget
you never
forget
you always
remember (Cervantes 221)

Cervante's own trauma – her mother's violent murder allows her to empathize with David while touching on the way that forgetting traumatic events are near impossible. For the memories are always there – just a layer away. I find that that is true. That you can go to therapy, you can turn to art and create, heal yourself – your body, mind, soul as best as you can, but it is always there. In several of the pieces in this poetry collection, the narrator of these pieces is triggered – their memories, their sense of smell and touch. In my poem "exorcizar a un demonio: un prólogo" the narrator has difficulty being close or affectionate with a boy without being

triggered by a traumatic event. She recalls the way that certain sounds echo when she's near that boy, and how they fade away when he's gone:

Afterwards, he walks away - the noise goes away.
The *click-clack* of tan ostrich cowboy boots.
The *ding* of a belt buckle.

The boy in the poem is not a threat, but the narrator's trauma is too mentally and emotionally present for her to be comfortable or engaging with him. By writing poems that had my narrator encounter and reflect on those triggers, I was trying to give a narrative form that allowed me to navigate my own. Writing – creating poetry was a way in which I found myself trying to let go of my trauma. It was why I found Michelle Otero's approach in *Malinche's Daughter* to write to heal so intriguing.

I do believe that Otero's writing to heal approach works, that it is possible that creating out of trauma and hurt can be beneficial and healing to someone. But I am coming to understand that it takes time and that it is not going to be a linear journey. Otero herself acknowledges this. As she was writing *Malinche's Daughter* she struggled to name the person who had raped her when she was a child. The book of lyric essays was covering her work in Oaxaca with sexual assault survivors, seeing as she was one herself, she included her own assault but couldn't name her assailant. Ultimately, she did – her brother had raped her. In the essay "Weight of a Word" she explained "In remaining silent, we only protect our shame. Shame has enough protection. It does not need our help" (Otero 171). The first time I read the essay, I remember crying. Five pages had caused me to sob like a newborn. I understood all of her reasonings, her fears, her doubts, and ultimately her decisions. I never wanted to give a name to what happened to me, to give it an aggressor – even when I knew the truth – but I never wanted to write it down – to have others know. I was willing to smother it, to spend the rest of my life locked away behind my ribs.

But then, when I couldn't stop hurting, when I couldn't stop killing myself, I realized that there was no justifiable reason for me to carry that on my own. Till this day, even as I put these words down – I struggle to let the truth be. Like Otero, I do not want to hurt my family, I don't mean to ruin someone's memory, but I deserve to heal – and to do so means I have to be truthful. Otero says, "Telling the truth, asking others to take responsibility for their action or inaction, is not the same as blaming" (Otero 170). By allowing this truth to live within some of these poems I attempt to shed the shame, the secrecy so that I might not be alone in carrying the weight of something that wasn't mine to carry in the first place.

Writing alone has not healed my wounds, but it is a step forward. By writing and leaning into the stages of *conocimiento*, I am able to shed the shame – the secrets – the silence – whether it is through writing, language, or theories of knowing. By confronting the trauma and attempting to navigate through it, to write through it and to be past it I have learned that shame so deeply ingrained is not so easily shed, and that remaining silent – keeping secrets weighs heavily whether they are hidden or brought to light. That writing it all down, even understanding that it is not your shame to carry can result in falling back ten steps instead of taking steps forward. Though even when steps are lost, something is gained, a deeper understanding of one's self, the understanding that until you can heal past the trauma, past the shame, you first have to get to know it. I asked myself a question at the beginning of this project, could I heal myself through my art? At the end of this part of the journey, I got an answer – not one that I wanted – but one that I understood. That by continuing to grow and develop my art, and myself as a person, that one day I'd find the answer. For now, I do my best to navigate through it.

Writing about Love, the Body, and the All of the Rest

Much of this work is spent exploring a story of womanhood, one that is embedded with

trauma, mental health, and the complexities of familial bonds. Yet I hoped that all these poems once put together – once read as a whole could reflect a full image of who the narrator of this work was or is throughout these poems. She who deals with her mental health issues, she who feels a kinship with Frida Kahlo, who resents the power of patriarchy, who cares about climate change, who loves love, she is more than her trauma, than the heavy truth she's unveiling. It is my hope that this image is reflected in this collection.

There is a small collection within this collection that are love poems. I am a romantic at heart, I guess I would say that I love – love, or maybe the concept of love. The poems explore the act of love, of loving, of believing in love. Not only in romantic love, but also in self-love, and everything that that embodies. It can be desire, loneliness, yearning, or contentment, love is tied up in all of this whether it is being shared with someone or something else, or even one's self. I was a little hesitant to include them within this collection due to the much heavier topics that are covered in this work. Ultimately, I decided to keep them, because my goal was for this collection to share a full story, the good and the bad, and it seemed unfair to the work – to the narrator to not include love. Poems like “Mole y Arroz,” “hungry.” and “a home aubade” are influenced and inspired by Yesika Salgado, a poet that I originally found on Instagram. She's published three poetry books, that work as a sort of series. Her most recent book *Hermosa* was the conclusion to the series. All three of the books are embedded in love, whether it is a lover, a family member, or Los Angeles the city she calls home. In an interview on NPR for Latino USA she talks about loving and how she's reached a clarity with herself that welcomes love, and is a romantic at her core, but has discovered:

That nothing is missing from me. I'm Yesika whether I have someone to love or I don't.

And that even makes me more of a romantic because I'm not going to love to find the rest

of me. I'm going to love because I choose to go to love. Because I want to experience what sharing all of me is like with someone else. ("Yesika Salgado On Love, Lust, And Being A Hopeless Romantic," 00:16:07 – 00:16:30)

I find her perspective something to look towards – as someone who loves love I hope to write about love – not to acquire it – or lament over it but to seek it to experience it for the sake of loving. That isn't quite reflected yet in the few poems I included in this collection, though I did try. One of the poems, "a home aubade" began with the narrator yearning to reconvene with their lover as they parted in early dawn. I decided in a kind of spur of moment revision that I wanted to tweak that perspective. I removed the lover and left the narrator yearning for herself – in the sense that they wanted to come home, to unwind. It was my intention that by removing the lover, the narrator was no longer engaging with romantic love but instead with self-love or self-care. It was still engaging with love, just a different aspect of love.

I am glad that I included these poems and hope that they fit into the overall narrative of the collection. This story of womanhood, and all that that embodies. Just as I had to write about love – to include it here, I also wanted to write about the body and how it plays in this collection. Because the body is a victim, a memory collector, and a place of re-creation.

The body under the microscope here is a fat body – and I didn't want to do the disservice of speaking about it or treating it as an excuse. Yesika Salgado has talked about her relationship with her body. In a TEDx Talk she talks about the ways she's hid her body, thinking that it barred her from engaging with the world in the ways that she wanted to. At one point during her talk she says, "I don't know which is the lie. My love for my fat body or my desperation to escape it. Can love and hate live in the same place?" ("What Comes After Loving Yourself? Advice from a Fat Fly Brown Girl | Yesika Salgado | TEDxCalStateLA," 00:00:52 – 00:01:00)

Salgado's talk was on my mind when I wrote "Gorda. Peluda. Prieta." That poem in particular was born out of family party I had attended. One of my aunts commented on my weight, and it was as though I was kid again. Being told I was too chubby – too dark skinned – too hairy. They had taken one look at me and made assumptions about who I was going to be – what my place was going to be in the world. The sad part was that I recognized the ways in which I had let them have that power over me. Not just them, but random strangers – like the lady who frowned when I didn't let her wax off more of my eyebrows. In the poem the narrator asserts her power at the end, takes up the space she deserves and refuses to let others make her feel small for being big. She is where I hope to be someday.

Conclusion

The work that I've created in this thesis is the beginnings of a healing. I believed that simply writing all of it down would complete it – I'd finish this and wrap it all up. One of the findings at the end of this journey is that it takes more than that. In this work I am sharing a truth, so that its weight might no longer weigh the body – the soul down. It is so that the woman at the center of this collection – this story is revealed in all her flawed, jagged edges. So that might pave the way to her peace – whether it be now or in the future. It is my hope that at the end of these poems her story reveals the entirety of who she is in this collection. That her story – her journey can join the chorus of other Chicana/Latina women who are done with secret-keeping, with labels imposed by others, and recognize the power of their voice – their truth. That they may shed their *piel de víctima* and gain *armadura de sobreviviente*.

CHAPTER II

A PRIMER VISTA

detras de las apariencias

snapshots of a family after michelle otero

Snapshot 1: Freeze Frame

It's torn, edges frayed-singed, creases – from folds – perhaps balled up. My hair is pulled back, split into high ponytails and braided. I sit on what might be my father's lap. Or maybe it's my mother's. We're pressed so close – I can't tell. My hands, chubby, small – clenched into fists. My nose scrunched – a pout – frowning. Eyes looking out of the frame – I've never liked pictures. Mámi y yo las unicas que quedamos. Her – hair pulled back, smile on her face. De mi apa – only a bit of a hand – thick brown fingers at my side – the gold of his ring shinning in the sun. What's left of his frame is a hulking shadow. Minutos, seran horas despues que la camara nos enjambrará - madre e hija en su enojo.

Snapshot 2: Mid-Bite

It is intact. Edges clean – pristine, as though untouched or looked at since its development. Estoy comiendo. Mi boca está abierta - ojos arrugados, cabello suelto. Crispy bacon between my fingers. A bracelet – cheaply made – purple and pink around my wrist. Una de oro con mi nombre en la muñeca opuesta. It used to get resized every year. It's the same one I'm wearing in the only family portrait we have. I was about one then. There's a picturesque wallpaper behind me, flores y frutas against a beige background plastered underneath the cabinets, over the sink. Perfect plastic placemats and a lace tablecloth, a perfect front. En las orillas the dark is creeping in, a finger behind the lens – creo que era el detras de la camara. The hallway is clear, a bedroom in the background – door open. The edge of an old wooden chest in the background. I know the stuffed animals are on its top, an oversized rabbit, duck, and Pooh Bear he brought from out of town. They shadow the room even in the peak of the day. Todos lo sabíamos? Lo que presenciarian, o podrian haber presenciado ya?

CHAPTER III

LOS SECRETOS INCRUSTADOS EN LA SANGRE

sangre aullando

I was built in fragments,

clay that's been pinched - spun too many times.

Seperate pieces

forcedtofittogether,

a reflection that remains distorted.

I fear myself when I'm behind the wheel,

when the wounded h o w l s in my mind e c h o,

and I'm driving through my neighborhood,

past the Target where I ran into my stepbrother,

the Walmart where his daughter works.

I drive around them,

stop sign to stop sign

aimless.

The howls are still echoing – a crescendo in tune with my pulse.

I brake and roll to a stop - the other me,

perhaps the braver me - wraps her car around the nearest pole.

I fear I don't

K N O W

the difference

between

the truth,

nightmares,

memories.

I find in the swirling dark brown of my eyes

his gaze,

him

in the roundness of my face,

the shape of my nose

the thickness of my brows,

HE

HE

HE

HEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

Apá,

Dad.

the thing

The Thing is, you were eleven years old when they diagnosed you.

The Thing is, the therapist said, you'll deal with it all your life.

The Thing is, she continued, it's caused by trauma.

The Thing is - you dig fingernails into your palms - look away. You were only nine, you can smell – Bud Light and cigarette smoke, you taste ash with every breath, hear the belt buckle – the ding as it is loosened, the door was open - the hallway light on. Afterwards he rolled over – said your mother's name.

The Thing is, no one knew - no one could know.

I don't think even he knew.

The Thing is, *usted esta equivocada*. Your mother protested. *Que hice mal?*

The Thing is, your mother said, *no se que tienes – porque te sientes asi..* One hand on the wheel, the other holding a cigarette. *Que si vamos a la iglesia? Alamejor, necesitas amigas, algo que te entretenga. Rezale a Dios.* Si ama, you said and buckled in.

The Thing is, you stapled the wound without disinfecting it. In the bursts of anger – slammed doors. Hot tears that burned your cheeks, too sensitive they whispered. It allowed The Thing to remain - infected - left to fester with scabs and oozing puss. You never let it heal, always afraid someone might see the cause – the proof of what you had allowed.

The Thing, your own moaning llorona was your constant visitor. Your mother nodded in approval, *ya ves, todo esta bien*. Good grades, friends, and she was satisfied. Eyes averted from scabs in odd places - your hands, the insides of your elbows, your wrists.

The Thing is, the therapist was right. Sixteen years later - The Thing is still with you. Only now, it doesn't tear flesh - instead it feasts on your insides. It's ravenous for hours you should be studying, running errands, even washing your dishes. It weighs down your arms and legs when your mind recalls that the laundry needs to get done. When you need to go to work, it takes your hands and calls in instead. It vomits memories into your brain when all you want is to kiss a boy, wear a dress.

The Thing is, he's gone - six feet under, and you - well - The Thing is . . .

rezando el padre nuestro

Padre nuestro que estas en el cielo santificado sea tu nombre.

Te ruego - look down upon this daughter.
Her glazed eyes, searching for you in the crevices.

Noises bitten off – inarticulate, her tongue gone – torn off.

Hagase tu voluntad asi en la tierra como en el cielo.

Prove to her - this cannot be for you - from you.
Stop his heart - his hands.
Let the phone ring - an alarm sound.

*Danos hoy nuestro pan de cada dia, y perdona nuestras ofensas,
como nosotros perdonamos a los que nos ofenden.*

He'll drink black coffee, smother his eggs in salsa verde.
The gifts, the money will increase then fade away. Does he remember?
She - your daughter – dismembered limbs held together with frayed nerves.

Too angry to forgive, and too afraid to ask for forgiveness.

No nos dejes caer en tentacion y liberanos del mal.

Remove the poison, the faulty memories, fears, and shame.

Cleanse this begging daughter, Lord.

Amen.

batalla de mente y cuerpo.

I read somewhere that depression, anxiety can cause memory loss.

La memoria de mi niñez se siente incompleta.

Only gaps and vague pictures left behind.

I write about him – about what he did.

Pero en el oscuro – o atrapada en el trafico – sola

I ask.

Estas segura?

It has to be true, no?

If not, why am I afraid?

Por que su presencia me llenaba de terror?

Por que no confío en los hombres?

Tensa como un animal acorralado cuando les doy la espalda.

Nervios en alerta – lista para correr o pelear.

Control held like a lifeline – don't drink, don't smoke.

The smell of Bud Light and cologne makes me tense.

Le tengo miedo a mi propia sombra, de hombres con voces severas y pies pesados.

If it didn't happen, if my memory and my mind have been lying to me

entonces, por que mi cuerpo – mi alma

–

se siente como un campo

de batalla devastado?

en el cementerio.

El lugar de su Descanso – esta menos de diez minutos de mí.

I drive past it five days out of seven.

I don't glance, most days I don't notice.

Except when I do.

When I've woken up con mis nervios expuestos
y los auillidos en mi cabeza
que me dejan don la piel en carne viva.

No me puedo ver a los ojos eso días
instead I brush my teeth staring at the sink
me levanto el pelo – buns and ponytails
I wear long sleeves and jackets.

Layers to shield myself – too aware of what others might see.

On those days, I drive past – and I look
hands locked onto the steering wheel
I hold myself back from turning, from stopping.

If I do, I'm not sure what I would do.

Sé lo que me gustaría hacer.

Dig him up – break through his pretty marble covering,
past the layers of dirt and fresh cut grass,
take a sledgehammer to the marble bench,
to the plaque with his name.

What would I find beneath the steel blue coffin?
Decay? Shriveled skin?
A body dissolved – or filled with maggots?
Encontraré la claridad – la paz que busco?

Instead, when the urge wins
when I find myself parked at the graveyard
I sit in my car – with the door open, one foot still in.

If I manage to make it to the grave,
I stand there – sit on that marble bench,

look down at its pale blue stone
and the bronze plaque, proclaiming
“Beloved Father, Dearly Missed.”

exorcizar a un demonio: un prologo

He holds my hand – I pull away.
Draws me in - this boy with sweaty palms.
Misunderstands my averted gaze - nerves.
Sixteen, sweet – too sweet for his age.
He's here, but he feels so far away.
He doesn't know how tainted I am.

How do I explain? The leviathan in my head.
The one that looks like you dad – like me.
This Thing inside me - your parting gift.
I – a corpse – left for the vultures.

Afterwards, he walks away - the noise goes away.
The *click-clack* of tan ostrich cowboy boots.
The *ding* of a belt buckle.
You - parasite - disease.

I avoid my reflection, fill my days with white noise.
You made a ghost of me – this living husk shuffling along.

I've never hated you more.

el ritmo de la memoria.

Tenía miedo de los sonidos de mi infancia, la risa, el chirrido de un par de zapatillas. Tenía miedo de que aparecieras, como una pesadilla. Evité las cumbias, el pop, los bailes, no quería sentir nostalgia. Verás, pensé que si lo hacía, si lo permitía, significaba que también te extrañaba. Que extrañaba lo que había hecho, las cosas, los lugares donde estaba con usted.

Pero no puedo – no – no te dejaré robar otra cosa de mí.

Mejor canto, in the shower even when the water tastes like shampoo. Mi voz tratando de armonizar con Como la Flor de Selenia.

Me dejo recordar el sentido de harina entre mis manos mientras Los Angeles Azules tocaban y mama cocinaba. Bailo con Celia Cruz, with Britney Spears, and OV7 mientras doblo ropa.

Me lo llevo todo de vuelta. Los discos que había puesto aun lado. Tengo que – ya no puedo ser esta carga que has hecho de mí. Mi espíritu se niega a vivir asustada. No puedo borrar lo que está hecho, pero puedo vivir. Sin ti.

Te has ido – muerto, comida para los gusanos – y yo – bueno, mi corazón late por mí y continuará latiendo solo por mí.

espera.

Es vómito de palabras, queman como ácido. La forma en que él (mi padre) sigue derramándose de mí. Este villano muerto resucita cada vez que pongo pluma en papel.

Lo odio, lucho contra el océano en mí interior, las mareas crecientes que traen nuevas palabras, todavía manchadas en su memoria.

Dicen, *tienes que hacerlo.*

Dicen, *escríbelo.*

Leo, *escribo para sanar.*

Las palabras me cortan, un mantra que me llena de tristeza. Porque todo lo que se derrama de mí es dolor.

Solo quiero terminar. Terminar de cauterizar la herida solo para abrirla nuevamente.

Sigo esperando el renacimiento, el gran regreso que se supone que debo tener.

Nada aún.

Solo yo, todavía dolorida.

- i. *todos cargamos la herencia de nuestra familia*
quieramos o no

herencia de una madre

15 years old – stubborn and headstrong
she plants her feet and refuses to budge.
Marries a man old enough to know better,
follows him to Dallas, Texas.

Then – belly heavy with a boy,
bruises hidden beneath pretty blouses, neat hair
and a parody of a marriage she doesn't leave,
too ashamed to go home to Reynosa.

*Yo sabia con lo que me habia casado.
¿Pero que iba hacer? Me quede.*

Her firstborn – Ivan
he's born with a frown
his father's shadow
and quick to anger, quick to hit.

She cuddles him – loves him
with every inhale and exhale.
She prays after every outburst,
when he slams her doors,
says she's dead to him – she prays.

Es mi hijo, y lo quiero – pero ya no puedo.

Her second child - Liza,
is born screaming and crying
her heart aching even then.

She cradles her after and watches her breathe,
desperately wishing she could tuck her away.
Her gut heavy with stones – like a warning.

Her daughter grows like a prickly pear cactus,

like the ones that border her gardens,
and she blooms as they do.

Liza is all genio, miel y veneno in her words,
una amenaza para los hombres a los que no se sucumbe,
her autonomy a game they cheat at to win.

Hay dias que fuera preferido que fuera sido hombre.

Her third – Jorge
nearly kills her. “Push,” they say
“you have to push!” - her body’s weak,
her will rises and falls like a storm in the ocean.

He grows and leaves a trail of mistakes and fuck ups,
each one trying to make up for the last one.
She looks at him with an ache in her
womb, thinks - *was it me?*

Jorge, hijo mio. Te quiero . . .

Her last one – Maria
conceived far apart from her siblings,
his (her husband’s/ God’s) last attempt to prove
- *something* in their marriage.

She’s a flutter of movement
constantly turning – kicking
making herself known.

She goes quiet – too quiet, and the doctor says
“There’s nothing we can do, go home,”

says, “Wait for your body to bleed her out.”

She yells, argues and bargains
with her doctors – her husband – God,

fears maybe it was her fault – she didn't want her.

But she can't let her go now.

They cut her out, stubborn
a beautiful – painful trait in all her children.

This second daughter refuses to come naturally
unwilling to leave the safety of her womb – already
so afraid of the world around her.

*Maria es la mas vulnerable de mis hijos, pero la mas fuerte.
Me da miedo la soledad con la que se rodea.*

After she cradles this baby like she did her sister once – otra nina
she asks, *¿por que senor?*

Daughter's are not safe in this world

los silencios de mi abuelo.

There's my grandpa
seated on my grandmother's olive-green sofa
dressed in his Sunday best, grey slacks
and a black dress shirt, his *sombrero* at his side.

No recuerdo cuando dejo de usar sus botas vaqueras.

Rays of sunlight cut through the screen door,
tracking the dust in the air, and turning
the grey hair at his temple shiny silver.

*Tengo recuerdos – piezas en mi memoria,
cuando su pelo estaba oscuro.*

Or maybe it was the florescent lighting – the glare of the TV.

I wished there was more
than my spotty memory
that had captured
the wrinkles on his hands
brown, mole-dotted skin.

His head thrown back, his chest shaking
in laughter at my ridiculous attempts
to cartwheel across their tiny living room.

El era el unico que me hacia sentir a salvo en ese apartamento.

I wish I had appreciated the many ways he watched over me,
distracting me from my father's drinking,
even if it was simply by sitting with me.

EL era la calma para el resentimiento de mi abuela.

I wish I could have captured the warmth
of his laugh, the serenity he exuded
as my uncles' voices competed,
trying to out talk each other.

The glimmer in his eyes, when he sneaked me chocolates before meals,
and comfortable silence as we sat, watching Los Simpsons.

I wish I would've known that after he was gone,

the sun coming in through the screen door would appear dull.

That there would be no more Simpsons,
or candies before dinner, only my drunken father
and my grandmother, and I trapped between them.

mi abuelo tano

era collector de historias

el las derramaba al azar

del rancho que dejo en Matehuala
the hills – mountains I could only imagine.

He couldn't do much on his own at 100,
su cuerpo estaba curvado, encorvado
he shuffled instead of walked,
but you'd never know if you heard him speak.

Mi abuelo nunca fue viejo,
su cuerpo si – se canso,
pero su espíritu siempre fue joven.

Me acuerdo en pedazos,
su historias – mi ama al principio lloraba,
ahora sonrie cuando lo recuerda.

I re-call the timber of his voice,
his gray slacks – white t-shirts,
his thinning hair.

EL lugar vacio donde el antes se sentaba,
the clothes packed away in a blue leather suitcase,
y una familia que lo llevan siempre con ellos.

Mi abuelo era un hombre de historias,

sus recuerdos y su voz continúan,
dejando su espíritu con nosotros.

is it apathy?

this burning within her chest,
like waves battering against a fragile shore.

It's part anger – part frustration,
at herself – maybe . . .

As she carves into her chest,
nails tearing past tissue and bone,
hot blood up to her elbows, she searches
for the loss, the pain she has to feel.

The blood on her hands dries,
becomes sticky with memories spread across her palms.

Memories of her grandmother:

Her wave as she turned away – never glancing back,
watching as her son dragged his daughter off once more.

Another cookout - and a breathalyzer he couldn't turn on without her.

Her walk - as she passes by the living room.

Glancing away, as her precious baby boy
bared his resentment, sprawled across the sofa.

Bare-footed in his slacks and white muscle shirt,
beer can in one hand, remote in the other.

Slurred woes spilled from sneering lips,
onto the shoulders of her nine-year-old granddaughter.

Her silence - her shaking limbs,
as the stroke caused her to fall from the bed,
eyes wide and fingers reaching - twitching,
for her granddaughter.

Her cries - broken, shoulders hunched
weathered mole spotted hands,
grasping at her son's coffin,
her grief echoing.

That nine-year old girl, now twenty-one

with hands clenched, selfishly wishing
she felt that pain too.

She carries memories of her grandmother
in their shared blood, the things that went unsaid.

She doesn't mourn – perhaps, doesn't know how to.

Instead, she digs inside herself for the grief that's not there,
only finds resentment – and guilt.

The dead shouldn't be resented right?

It may not be apathy – what it is hasn't found a name yet.

frustracion familiar

A los hijos de un hombre ya muerto,
nuestro patriarca que en la tierra descansa,
a ustedes . . . los de acruzar la calle,
los vivos – gasto de hijos – de familia.

Ustedes, que a escondidas como chachalacas,
juzgan con los brazos cruzados
dan sus opiniones con los culos pegados al asiento.

Envidian por envidiar,
llenos de orgullo y coraje,
pero no asumen responsabilidad.

Se discuplan – labios prensados,
“No es responsabilidad mia.
Papa le dejo la casa, no?
Que ella cuide a Ama.”

Sus espinas escondidas detras
de sonrisas falsas.

Se lavan las manos, regresan
a sus casas – sus familias.

Ignoran que mi abuela
en su dolor – su malestar
necesita de su familia y ellos no aparecen.

Son cobardes – pero saben llorar,

lloran – y se quejan cuando mi abuela se enferma,
cuando batallan con ella la hora que la visitan.

Lloraran como lo hicieron cuando murio mi abuelo – histericamente.

Hipocritas – ojala que se los trage el remordimiento.

Todos le dicen a mi mama,
“Dios, te va a bendecir. Vas a ver!
Un trono te espera en el cielo!.”
Y mama– ella sonrie y se encoge de hombros – dice, “No lo hago por eso.”

Y yo – y mi hermana nos mordemas las lenguas,
tragamos sangre hasta que nos ahogamos.

Porque todos voltean los ojos,
o veran sera con satisfaccion como mi madre,
no sale de esa casa, hundida en deudas,
aguanta resentimientos y acusaciones de su madre
su pelo gris y su edad reflejada mas que nunca antes,

porque todos los demas tienen responsabilidades – familias que cuidar,
pero mama no, verdad?

Y me da miedo – porque me la oigo decir,

“Oye, no te avia dicho . . .”

Y me rio, y doy gracias que esta conversacion es por telefono,

“Ya me avias dicho Ama.”

La miro y siento el tiempo deslizarse entre mis dedos.

Tradicion dice que los hijos les toca cuidar a los padres en la vejez.

Honor, amor dicta que lo hagamos sin expectativas.

Y lo entiendo, se que un dia yo lo hare.

Pero alli - en la lengua y sangre que me trago corre

mi frustracion

mi coraje

mi miedo.

PORQUE NO ES LA UNICA

SON SEIS EN TOTAL

PORQUE NO RESINTIRE A MIS ABUELOS

~~porque duele sentir perder las pocas tradiciones que nuestra familia tiene~~

~~porque extraño a mi abuelo — su seguridad — su presencia~~

Perdoname abuelito. Te extrañamos.

CHAPTER IV

MOMENTOS Y TIEMPO

el aleteo de una mariposa.

Around 2016 we drove past fields of cows, horses, and fields of yellow-green towards Austin. Feet on the dashboard, we sang with Beyoncé, Mana, the Weeknd. Memories of Starbucks to-go cups, pre-concert selfies, Adele at the Frank Erwin center, and post-concert drinks, all bittersweet memories bundled away in Snapchat memories.

Around 1994 my sister pushed me off the second-floor stairs of our one-bedroom apartment. My red and yellow fisher price car bounced down the stairs where my brother waited. His arms wide-open, crooked grin on his face. A plastic tire hit the rail, the plastic car flipped over, I cried. It was just an experiment, they said.

Around 2002 I tripped in the hallway of another rented home, needles in my chest - unable to breathe. I stumbled to my feet only to land on my knees – sure I was dying. Abby’s baby babble echoed from the kitchen. Her siblings squabbled in the living room – mom was hours away. My first panic attack.

Around 2014 my father died – a stroke. They kept his body alive for five more days. I didn’t recognize the man we buried. My sister was hysterical – my brother drank in his honor while they played corridos. I had never breathed easier.

Around 1997 my grandmother kissed my forehead as she passed by. I smiled and speared another piece of watermelon, swinging my feet back and forth.

Around 1998 I stood at the edge of a boat, following the dolphins that rose and dove beside us. The tour guide droned on through his megaphone. A teacher yelled. A group of classmates ran past, bumping me and sending my dolphin keychain overboard. I’d promised my grandpa a souvenir; I hoped he wouldn’t be too disappointed.

Around 1991 my mother got pregnant with me, my father rejoiced. My sister cried and yelled, “I hate her! I hate her!” Today, my sister laughs about it. And I don’t flinch when she lifts her high heels.

Around 2009 after four years I saw my father at a quinceanera. He slurred as he spoke, singing praises – promises to the table and me. His hand clamped on my bare thigh. I threw up that night. It was the last time I spoke to him.

Around 2012 I drove to the beach. I sat in the sand until the ocean shined underneath the moon’s light. I traced figures in the sand. The waves only washed them away. I kept tracing.

CHAPTER V

LAS DESAPARECIDAS: AMOR, CORDURA E IGUALDAD

j10'92

I didn't think I'd live this far / 27 - a few years past my expiration date / victory – is what it
should be / a blessing / a fuck you – to the depression / to the ghosts / from my podium – gold
medal around my neck – scars faded – yelling I won! / Why this far? – I don't have that answer –
yet / I search for it / in the mornings when I wake / when I brush my teeth. / sit here and write –
wondering why / the wariness – heaviness of living past a limit – that at its core might be self-
imposed – I hope - has an ending. / now – I move ahead / I wake – try – to be worthy / I fail
some days more than others / I try – I hope it is enough.

i. *deja que mi piel te cuente una historia.*

deja que mi sangre se ilumine.

word problems about depression

after chen chen's "quantitative reasoning"

One

I don't know how many more relapses I've got left. I am afraid the next one is the one I don't push past.

Two

& I've gone through about 4 in the last 3 years. Each one longer - heavier than the last. Take 300+ pounds of me and + the weight of insomnia – random crying fits – bad coping habits, and a sadness that took root in me when I was eleven. How much do I weigh then?

Three

Weekly Positives:

I've had two panic attacks this week. I got out of bed. I wrote this. This is what I consider the positive.

Four

If 3 days equals the amount of time it takes to wash my dishes, and 14 months equals the amount of time I quit therapy, & 10 missed calls result in less than 3 answered texts, how much time before I admit I fucked up?

Five

Which of these is the easiest?

- A: One hour of no social media distraction.
- B: 20 Push-ups.
- C: Admitting the bad place feels safe.

Six

I am jealous of my siblings & the way that they can cope without therapy & antidepressants for over 20 years. They can fake they're ok, no label like a pop-up warning with every interaction. It tends to scare people away. Then again, my sister can't not lie & my brother drinks every night.

Seven

Maybe it isn't too late to aim for recovery.

Eight

In order to calculate why I haven't died yet, you need to collect one unfinished degree, a mother's love, the beat of a good song, a voice wrecked by singing while sick, & multiply it by the smell of homemade tortillas de harina. Add the warmth of arroz con leche, and then subtract the times I wrote a good-bye/apology letter.

Nine

On a scale of 1 to 100, what is the median amount of years one messed up woman spends hiding her mental illness, afraid of – of the *what happens after?*

100

Skunk and menthol scented through the air
they were getting high again
they'd be asleep in about 30 mins

I laid awake – in the dark – unable to sleep
I held my breath and began to count
trying to reach 100

I couldn't get there – moments slipping
numbers tangled in my thoughts – tongue.

I stared at the ceiling, counting.
I tracked shadows, still counting.

My chest burned – my eyes
I coughed in the darkness
syncing with the ones next door.

I tossed around in the sheets
through the grip of aged poly cotton
my lungs expanding – filling
with sharp tasting air. Residual
smoke mingling as it swept in,
through the vents in the ceiling.

I fucking hate the smell of weed.

Sliding off the bed, I reached for the bottle on the dresser.
Guided by moonlight, I aimed towards the spinning overhead fan.
The room filled with the artificial smell of cherry blossoms.

I got back into bed, climbing under poly cotton sheets
the floral quilt my grandmother had given me.
I breathed in, only Febreze this time.

Outside voices began rising.
“What the fuck is your problem?”

Old pipes groaned, the rattle of a doorknob.
“Hurry up! I want to shower!”

I rolled over, laid on my back
breathed in till my lungs were filled
began counting, trying for 100.

on the precipice

Darkness wraps this room

shadows – sweeping over furniture

weaving in and out. The sound

of cars driving by bleeds

in through the loose windowpanes.

Underneath her pillow a buzzing sound

the phone lit up – her mother's smiling face.

The screen's light stings – she stares

until the screen fades to black.

Hours later – only silence

a sound of its own.

A red number 1 claims a not – yet – listened to – voicemail

her mother's voice, “Mija, nomas te hablaba para ver como te fue hoy.

Ala major ya estas dormida. Mañana hablamos – love you.”

In the resting silence she plays it again.

“Mija . . . manana hablamos . . .”

Tomorrow feels daunting – desired but vague.

Will she rise in the middle of the night

chest too tight – the sadness too strong

for the pills – the weekly counseling

the self-care techniques – will tonight be

the night they exhaust themselves?

Will she give in?

Tear open the scabs, her chipped

nails sickly with her own blood.

Or will it be tomorrow?

In a tiny room miles away from home

she fights against the panic – fear – that sadness

a prisoner in her own mind and body

she lays in the dark – with only her own shallow breath

in her ears. In the morning she calls her mother

hums and lets her chatter soothe the tightness in her chest.

“Bueno hija, que te vaya bien hoy. Love you.”

when I think about killing myself.

When I think about killing myself...
I can be washing my dishes.
I can be watching TV – another Scandal again.
I scroll through my phone, another shooting.
I feel guilt.

When I think about killing myself...
I am driving – to class – to work.
I count backwards from 100.
I think about how long it would take to find me.
I shuffle towards my kitchen – I serve myself water.
I am lying in bed.

When I think about killing myself...
I huff in frustration – I pull my hair.
I count the hours, 8 AM...1 PM...8:30 PM...
waiting for the day to end.
I take my antidepressants.

When I think about killing myself...
I live-in drawn-out minutes, the seconds
like church bells. I pull up my ex's contact, my thumb hovering
over the call function. I argue with my self-control – he's not the solution.
I drive to Target and walk aimlessly.
I buy things I don't need just to feel connected – even if just for a minute.

When I think about killing myself...
I pray I'm strong enough today.
I talk to God – La Virgen de Guadalupe – Jesus.
I look for guidance – I ask for absolution.
I lay in bed, go to sleep, and pray not to feel disappointed when I wake.

camas en cuartos ajenos

Son mas frias que la mia – las almohadas mas suaves
I look forward to overnigheters out of town
to long drives with a playlist – nada mas
que calles abiertas y campos verdes.

I want to check in,
swipe a card through a reader
habrir las puertas y para dar la bienvenida
a la quietud de una habitación extranjera.

Quiero pedir almuhadas extras
leave the AC at 62 degrees y cerrar las cortinas
allow them to turn a midafternoon into night.

Me gusta la soledad – la serenidad
within those walls - a double locked door
between me y el mundo.

No siblings at my door
pidiendo dinero,
pidiendo una ninera.

No raised voices in the hallway,
my sister yelling at her daughters,
“Laven los platos!” or “Pick up your shoes!”

My brother arguing with his phone,
“Chingadamadre! Work already!”
Their chaos bleeding through the walls.

Disfruto la distancia – pretendo
no tener que pensar
de dinero – grad school
my upcoming move – or my job.

Todo deja de existir
en las horas entre mí casa
y mi destinacion.

En una cama en un cuarto ajeno
I bundle myself in lily white sheets
take comfort in the cold

que viene con estas habitaciones
their illusion of a home away from home.

I shower under shitty water pressure

Respiro facil.

deja que frida te diga de nuestro amante favorito

El dolor y yo somos amantes.

(We are two of many.)

He and I have been intertwined
since I was born from my mother's grieving uterus
she who couldn't hold me in her arms
much less nurse me.

*(They cut me out
surprised I had survived.*

Perhaps, I knew even then.)

Por eso, a la mejor no me amo.

*(She does love me, my mother.
Even when I feared she didn't.)*

Loving me only hurt her, holding me
was a reminder she couldn't hold her dead son.

Love was scarce in our home,

*(Love . . . is complicated in our home.
It is distant, evasive – blind forgiveness.)*

Pain, instead was the one to love me,
to obsessively follow me.

(Us.)

Dios mio! Pero como me quiere!

(Su atención pesa.)

Me ama tanto que hasta lo siento en mis huesos!

*(Pero como lo amo a el – este dolor,
que vive en mi.)*

It was in the polio you know

that took part of my right leg
y me dejó torcida.

*(A mí – las palabras me ahogan
como admitir algo así – asalto y violación.)*

Oh! Pero este amor mio,
como me desea!

His gifts were always grand.

He couldn't touch me – so he used a bus.

*(He played with my brain
my memories – left gaps
anxieties and hang ups in place.)*

He lovingly gave me
a fractured spine, collarbone, and ribs.

(me corto la piel con razors, unas y avujas)

He loved me so much – he shattered my pelvis
broke my foot and dislocated my shoulder.

*(He gave me a pain I didn't understand,
only that it made it hard to swallow.*

So we intertwined our hands, and cut open my flesh.

He always croons, "One more, just one . . .)

Este amante mio,
hizo de mi una masoquista!

His obsession was so great,
so loving it never left me,
my body enveloped in chronic pain.

*(I hurt myself, was cruel to myself for so long.
For so far, I don't know how to move back.)*

El dolor – mi amante.
Mi companero de toda la vida.

(He took Frida, he's yet to take me.

He lingers around me instead.

Waiting.)

I loved him back.

(I don't want to. But he's so familiar.)

I love him longer – harder,
than I ever did my precious Diego.

*(I've never loved anyone else that way.
I hold my attraction inside like a prisoner, barred
afraid to enjoy when a man pulls me close.)*

Le di mi arte (*Le di mi mente*),
mi cuerpo y todo el dolor (*deje que tomara privilegios*)
que vivio en mi (*fui creada de su amor – su dolor*)
hasta mi ultimo respire (*cada dia le pido dame uno mas*).

ii. *En el espejo me encontré con la mirada de una mujer imperfecta.*

Sonreímos.

gaea in mourning

The Greeks believed Gaea birthed the earth
she – goddess – mother – created starry heavens
mountains, rivers, plains and seas.

Even – humans were believed to be her children.

What would she say of us now?

Would she be proud – ashamed

as she witnesses the effects of her descendants

who have filled her oceans with trash,
chemicals, and oils - fought over her rivers
as though they can be split – owned.

We've taken her gift
of air – polluted it with fumes
water – plastic bottled and privatized
land – decimated cultures to gain it.

Her world is getting hotter,
the land reflecting its inhabitants
burning what they were gifted.

Cathedrals hold more value
while amazon forests burn
and the ecosystem that keeps us alive disappears.

None of us are free of guilt,
victims of the bystander effect,
we've fiddled with our hands for too long.

We've grown complacent – all talk
put our pride – self-interest over a vote
as our administration – eyes glimmering
with dollar signs – mark our people as disposable.

Gaea weeps at what we've done,
as our youth – modern Cassandra's,
cry out and remain unheard.

I felt ashamed of the cards I was dealt, the chromosomes that made up my DNA. I was unfit, a jagged piece that didn't fit in society's puzzle. *Ay mija, mirate . . . vas a estar gordita . . . pobrecita*. They claimed to love me, yet they grimaced behind furrowed noses at my round cheeks. The fullness of my nose, and the thickness of my eyebrows.

I loved my aunts and their words felt like gospel, a road being paved to a better me. I was too big – so I stopped eating. My nose too big – so I clipped clothespins to it. If it hurt, it had to work. *Acuerdate hija, la belleza es dolor.* My eyebrows were dark and full, too much – so I shaved them off. My skin too brown, so I bought lighter makeup, wore long sleeves and cringed at the shade the MAC representative recommended.

Si estaba gorda, peluda, y prieta, al menos estaba a salvo, no? De manos y cuerpos mas grandes que yo – almenos eso pense.

My family – the world tells me be small, be quiet, *blend in*. I am too BIG, ROUND, LOUD, and FULL to *blend* in. – that shame, that I am too much hangs over me – a pendulum swinging *backbackback* and *forthforthforth*.

Who the fuck cares? You do though – too much.

I cannot be sick - *the medication would probably work better if you lost weight. (They send me home with ineffective medication – a menstrual cycle that last 30+ days.)* I am tired of being told I am too much.

I am tired of being the butt of a joke – of too many jokes. Of being assumed about because my brown skin stands out. Because my brows are full, and my nose too.

My existence is a form of resistance. I am too LOUDROUNDFULL, and I am determined to move the earth with my steps before I allow it to swallow me.

#shepersists

She is *paranoid*,
She is *exaggerating*,
She is *crazy*,
She is *overdramatic*.

The words spill from lips
that have always been listened to.

He has never had to fight
for the right to treat his body,
to make decisions over his own reproduction.

His insurance covers his Viagra,
hers doesn't cover birth control.
His pleasure is a *necessity*,
her protection is *selfish*.

Her body is policed,
splayed open and dissected,
her words doubted,
her experiences questioned.

No one cares. Not unless,
they can call her *sister*,
mother, *wife*, *property*.

Their actions attempt to police her body
for they cannot police her mind.

She *fights* for the right to simply *live*
for a future worth living in.

locked doors

I can't sleep with unlocked doors / without lighting every light / desde la puerta de enfrente hasta mi recamara al otro lado del apartamento / 15 minutos every night before I go to bed – comienzo / double checking them – buscando – never finding anything / the locks on the doors / the closets – en cualquier lugar alguien – o algo pueda esconderse / every night I look - hasta cuando se que no he salido / a ritual I can't sleep without / open doors aren't welcome / there is no safety in them / creci con ellas abiertas – desbloqueadas / a safety hazard left unsupervised.

Do you double – triple check locked doors? / Puedes dormir sin ellas? / Puedes ir a cama sin resar – sin pedirle a dios por descanso? / You, con tu imagen de fuerza, de confianza / do you fear what's in the past?

Pero – when our eyes meet / just a second – es un tirón en el estómago – a syncing of our pulses el momento de Aha! – like recognizing like.

No conocemos nuestros pasados, pero reconocemos nuestra armadura / you go running every morning – because you couldn't run then / I lock doors because I couldn't lock them then / we've built defenses – pegadas en la piel – bitch, osicona, bossy, callejera, educated – *distanceintelligencebeauty* – tools of resistance.

Compruebas si hay puertas cerradas? / Puedes dormir sin ellas?

I don't know the answer. / Pero si se la mirada en tus ojos. / I've seen it – en los míos – cuando eh podido verme en el espejo. / In the eyes of a woman passing by at the supermarket. / In a classroom. / In young faces, older faces, familiar and unknown faces.

You and I, somos fluidas en un idioma. / We might have learned it. / We might have inherited it. / Siempre deseamos ser la última.

iii. ¿amor, donde encontraras un hogar?

creando santuarios

I found peace in my grandmother's garden.
In her wrinkled hands in soil – like my mothers.
Shrubs of roses plumb and reaching for the sky.
Red, white, and yellow roses bridged together
around the space I'd claimed for myself.
The wire fence at my back, those rose bushes around me.

Rose petals would fall – I'd gather them
press them between the pages
of whatever book I was reading that week.

My grandmother always found me
winked at me as she'd slip me bowls of sandia.

Her roses were always blooming
I'd watch her as she trimmed them,
humming and talking to them.

She'd say – still does, “Les tienes que hablar –
cantarles para que crezcan.”

I'd lose myself in her santuario, sit in
the shadows, a Walkman by my side
earphones on my ears. I'd revel in the calmness
of my mind, as my breath slowed
and the jittering of my knees stopped.

I miss my grandmother's jardin
how easy it was to wander in it,
searching for the lighter parts of myself
in the smell of freshly cut grass
of roses in full bloom.

I miss watching her trim them – gathering
bushels and placing them in a vase.

She'd hand it to me, “Mija para tu cuarto –
nomas cuidame la base!”

I stopped by last Sunday, eyes always drawn
to the spaces where the rose bushes used to live
all there is now is grass – the garden is still green
and planters hang from tree limbs – from the hooks around the driveway.

There are no places to hide anymore, the trees are too high
my abuelita sits now by her bedroom window – where the light is perfect
embroiders pillows and towels – her walker at her side.

At home, I sing, and chatter away at my own plants,
building peace in my own home.

mole y arroz

La cocina esta lista y llena de el olor a pollo, arroz, y tortillas. Termino la salsa de mole y levanto la cuchara para probarla - perfecta como la de mama.

I am warm, a kitchen that smells of home – of love and as I serve a plate, voices drift from the dining table, “Rompi con el, sabes. I love him. Pero tuve que hacerlo.” Daniela broke it off again. The conversation continues – a volleyball match as I pull out glasses and plates. As I approach the table she says, “I did the right thing, right?” Her voice is pitched high – wine swirls in her glass – her cheeks are flushed.

We sit to eat and I hear a chorus of voices,

“El camino al corazon de un hombre es a traves de su estomago!”

Is that how women show their love?

La entierran en el pollo, el arroz y el calor de tortillas recién hechas?

I see a woman who serves a man a plate of food – her love, her heart disappears with every bite – and she waits – keeps waiting for him to give it back. With every kiss she tastes the food, the remnants of her love. Her tongue searches for the sweetness of his love – she imagines it tastes like sandia fresca in the middle of July. Fria y dulce sobre su lengua, she’d lick the sweetness off her lips afterwards.

She waits – stomach/heart growling – as he washes down her love with a beer.

She’s not the only one – so many women give their love away, their hearts and bodies for scraps.

For a sliver of affection and love.

I fear I one day will be that woman . . . watching him eat mole and arroz. Tear into a tortilla.

The *sweetspicy* flavor on his tongue – my love, my heart – while I starve.

My belly is filled with mole, arroz, y tortillas. Warm with love. My love.

Later, he will come home. Ask if there are leftovers. He’ll lean in, we’ll kiss and I’ll think of the Tupperware hidden in the back of the fridge.

“Sorry babe, it’s all gone.”

hungry.

I have a loneliness that's buried inside
that's taken root in my core.

My hungry core longing for something – that is, someone.

I stand here, fingers twitching
reaching, always reaching – even
when I know there's no one there – I
don't know who they are – what they look like.

No lovers to look back to – those chapters closed – eras ended.

Yet, I sit here longing . . . hungry.

The words sit – crackling on my tongue
like pop rocks – like Fitzwilliam Darcy
standing on the steps of Pemberley stammering
“I know – yes, I know . . .”
the *I know you* left unfinished – watching Elizabeth walk away.

I wrap myself in sheets, touch myself in the dark
eyes closed – the phantom image of someone else
of lips on a face I can't see, hands that alternate in shape and size
fingertips soft and then rough – my breath caught – a wave in the dark.

I have a loneliness that lives inside me
it yearns – we – yearn for touch, for love
and the idea that one day someone
might long for us too, when we hear
“Yes, I know . . .” understand *Yes, I know you*.

rose colored visions.

I think about you when I'm driving to work / of the way that you only drove with your left hand /
how you played ACDC and Drake/ let me play Rihanna and MANA / those Ray Bans you felt
naked without / the way you'd push them up into your hair / the color of your eyes / pools of
amber / the blue button up I loved / the scent of Armani that lingered on my clothes / how you
used to put too much butter on popcorn / then try to hold my hand / I think of your smile / your
smirk / the bite of your teeth / the way your charm hid your razor-sharp edges / the shape of a
smirk on your lips / how quickly it would shift / slide behind your dimples / how you'd say,
"Let's go" / to San Antonio / South Padre Island / Corpus Christi / Austin / just so we could drive
for a while / the first time you said *I love you* / lips pressed against our clasped hands / the last
time you said it / like a curse / the way we ended / shattered glass / something we couldn't take
back.

de corazon a corazon

Open up your heart and let me see what I've missed,
dejame explorar el amor en tus labios,
let me feel it in my hands, our fingers intertwined.

Open your heart and whisper to me,
let me trace the secrets we've shared
back into your skin, as I press them
with my fingertips, la forma
en que trace las figuras en tu espalda.

Open up your heart and remember,
the way we fell together, between
coffees, movies, and wine.

Open your heart y dejanos bailar,
dejame esconderme en el collar de tu camisa,
as we swayed, stumbling and laughing barefoot and tipsy.

Abre tu corazon y dejanos regresar,
a la isla de South Padre donde recargamos en la arena,
el sol en nuestros ojos, mi cabeza en tu pecho
tus manos en mi pelo y el ritmo de tu respire
debajo de mis manos.

a home aubade.

Tendrils of light threaten this shelter
eating away at the time I've stolen, limbs
they tense - fingers tightening across the sheets,
Do I have to?

This time I cherish to myself
cut short by the beginning of the day
asking for me to go forth to the others
the jobs, schedules that take up 90% of my time.

The new day brings a joy and a longing for it to end.
I miss it. The bottle of wine sitting at home.
The warmth of soft sweats and a sports bra.
The lack of armor.

The sun begins to set – *soon*.

“Let’s grab drinks, c’mon!” – *Maybe next time!*

A key slides into a lock, shoes are slid off.
Keys – purse – left on the dining table.
I’m home.

soledad.

Cuando el sol esta brillando en el cielo,
alli es cuando siento un vacio dentro de mi pecho,
cuando los pajaros cantan,
los tortolitos y sus chirridas de amor,
en esos momentos extraño el timbre de tu voz,
cuando el frio me envuelve,
y las sabanas no son suficiente,
ni las pijamas - extraño el calor de tu cuerpo,
cuando no se darle significado a mis palabras,
a mis pensamientos – mas que un *te extraño*
a ti, lo que sospecho es la otra parte de mi alma.

A ti que eres nada mas que un sueno.

CHAPTER VI

AL FINAL QUE ENCONTRASTE

terminacion. ¿ahora que?

Prediccion

Continuare derramando lo no deseado sobre el papel por un tiempo mas / I will have days where
I will avoid my own gaze / where I will triple check locked doors / encontrare otra herida
/ pero por cada mal dia que encuentre / aprendere algo nuevo / encontrare otra parte de mi / otra
oportunidad para sanar / para recuperar este cuerpo - este espiritu que se ha sentido extrano / my
depression will no longer be my enemy – we will learn to co-exist / Esperare con ansias mi
cumpleanos – no longer looking at them as expiration dates / I will continue to love – myself first
- another if the opportunity arises / I will learn to be kind to myself – No sere mi propia enemiga.

REFERENCES

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: the New Mestiza = La Frontera*. Fourth edition, twenty-fifth anniversary., Aunt Lute Books, 2012.
- Anzaldúa Gloria. “Now Let Us Shift . . . the Path of Conocimiento . . . Inner Work, Public Acts.” *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, by Anzaldúa Gloria and AnaLouise Keating, Routledge, New York and London, 2002, pp. 540–579.
- Cervantes, Lorna Dee. “Eighth Station.” *Drive: The First Quartet*, Wings Press, 2006, pp. 218–222.
- Dean, Michelle. “Kim Addonizio: ‘It’s a curse to say that somebody is confessional.’” *The Guardian*, 29 Jun. 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jun/29/kim-addonizio-poet-essays-bukowski-in-a-sundress>. Accessed 5 May. 2020.
- Ellison, Emily. “The Truth of Beauty: An Interview with Erika Sanchez.” *Porter House Review*, 13 April 2020, <https://porterhousereview.org/articles/the-truth-of-beauty-an-interview-with-erika-sanchez/>. Accessed 17 April 2020.
- González, Sonia V. “Narrating Traumatic Memories in Letters to David.” *Stunned Into Being Essays on the Poetry of Lorna Dee Cervantes*, Wings Press , 2011, pp. 155–195.
- Latina Feminist Group, *Telling to Live, Latina Feminist Testimonios*, Duke University Press, 2001.
- McKibbens, Rachel. *Blud*. Copper Canyon Press, 2017.
- McKibbens, Rachel. “Poetry as Therapy: Rachel McKibbens at TEDxFlourCity.” *YouTube*, uploaded by TEDx Talks, 1 August 2013, <https://youtu.be/xcgKRJYu-5I>.
- Meissner, Caitis. “The PEN Ten: An Interview with Diana Marie Delgado.” *PEN America*, 20 Mar. 2020, pen.org/the-pen-ten-an-interview-with-diana-marie-delgado/?fbclid=IwAR3PrM9gjsSQR57N682dfDKGk5pzR4KkP1qNeRhi_IDZeOsNIhCE4_b6uS0.
- Moraga, Cherrie., and Anzaldúa, Gloria. *This Bridge Called My Back : Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Expanded and rev. 3rd ed., Third Woman Press, 2002.
- Otero, Michelle, and Lisa D. Chavez. *Malinches Daughter*. Momotombo Press, 2006.

Otero, Michelle. "The Weight of a Word." *Fearless Confessions: A Writer's Guide to Memoir*, University of Georgia Press, 2010, pp. 169–173.

Reyes, Kathryn Blackmer, and Julia E. Curry Rodríguez. "Testimonio: Origins, Terms, and Resources." *Equity & Excellence in Education: Chicana/Latina Testimonios: Methodologies, Pedagogies, and Political Urgency*, vol. 45, no. 3, Taylor & Francis Group, July 2012, pp. 525–38, doi:10.1080/10665684.2012.698571.

Rosenbaum, S. "Confessional Poetry." *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, edited by Roland Greene and Stephen Cushman, 4th ed., Princeton University Press, 2012, pp. 296-297. *Gale eBooks*, <https://link-gale-com.ezhost.utrgv.edu/apps/doc/CX2388000248/GVRL?u=txshracd2633&sid=GVRL&xid=93e60b8b>. Accessed 20 Apr. 2020.

Salgado, Yesika. *Corazón*. Not A Cult Press, 2017.

Salgado, Yesik. *Tesoro*. Not A Cult Press, 2018.

Salgado, Yesik. *Hermosa*. Not A Cult Press, 2019.

Salgado, Yesika. "What Comes After Loving Yourself? Advice from a Fat Fly Brown Girl | Yesika Salgado | TEDxCalStateLA." *YouTube*, uploaded by TEDx Talks, 6 June 2017, <https://youtu.be/2oP3STw2jC8>.

Sánchez Erika L. *Lessons on Expulsion: Poems*. Graywolf Press, 2017.

Sexton, Anne. "Wanting to Die ." *Anne Sexton The Complete Poems*, Houghton Mifflin Company Boston, 1981, pp. 142–143.

"Yesika Salgado On Love, Lust, And Being A Hopeless Romantic." *Latino USA* from NPR, 14 February 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/02/11/805043338/yesika-salgado-on-love-lust-and-being-a-hopeless-romantic>.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mariela Cedillo earned a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in May 2020. Additionally, she earned a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Texas Pan-American in May 2015. She currently resides in the Rio Grande Valley. You are likely to find her baking or walking the aisles of a Target. (Email: marielacedillo.1@gmail.com)