IV

*Retorno a Mi Tierra Natal*

I

She is a middle aged mother.

Hunched over, her eyes housing hallucinations.

With feverish steps she stems,

from fingering her wounds.

Held hostage by toxins,

underpaid, and locked in.

Braised by the pages

of Bracero contracts.

*Diosito Santo,*

please douse her wet back,

with the strength of our people.

*Pero al pesar de todo*,

*Se revienta un grito*.

In crusty gloves, she holds the

throat of the world, its guttural appraisals.

Sliding the rosary beads,

one for *la virgencita*,

another for fatherland.

When the work gets heavy, she

swells her gorged diaphragm to sing. Instead,

coughing the Juarez Desert.

Undoing, with all deliberate speed,

an undocumented terror, its

tragic acute hearing --

within earshot, she hears her son’s cries,

3 days drive away.

Her frail mother,

with arthritic hands,

opening

--an enclosed remittance.

She hears

*La Migra!*

She hears

Strike! –

She hears

*Huelga*!

All through the grapevine,

the one’s she picked.

She is:

an Azure *chuparrosa*. Bird of the New World. With her

250 breaths per minute, beating life into *las labores*.

Flapping her wings at 50 times per second, she

wakes at 4 in the morning, to stir the earth awake.

This Avian scribe migrates ‘cross

continents, cross-pollinating golden *jirasoles,*

the roaring *cerros*. To

consulates that deny legal residency. To

the House in ruins, tattooing its walls with nectar, in

jagged penmanship. She is Dolores Huerta.

She is the Aztec eagle insignia,

perched at thorny fence,

*Pero siempre, siempre…*

Her *corazón* beats to the

stagger *del campesino agachado.* And now,

the landless may fly.

I in turn cry,

“What is Western civilization

But the plagiarism of flesh? The –“

Interrupting me,

she places her finger on my lips.

Unplucks a petal, collecting its dew

from pewed eyebrows.

And outside Roman aqueducts,

its porcelain-skinned pillars,

with a flicker of her hands,

she conjures a *tazita*,

licked in coarse adobe.

And inside,

she conjures my soul.

She is

Mayahuel, goddess of milk and honey.

I drank her *maguey;* her wombed cosmology.

And

suddenly,

the revelations before *Santa Maria* lay its mast.

I am ready to confront my past.

The ritual may begin:

II

My mestizaje is

*Tenochitlán* –place of the prickly pear.

Genesis of Self blossomed

‘gainst the ear of a cactus. In 1487, it soared across

gleaming white towers, the Great Temple

amidst floating islands. It

enshrined metropolis, bustling my spirit against a

quarter million inhabitants.

My mestizaje is

a dimly lit salon, plundered of its silvered rivers;

armories of long-yawned ash.

Spewing cannons, emptied of their canon.

Its plaster caved in

upon my sun-splattered skin.

My mestizaje is

a newlywed groom,

with hands fixtured at his bride’s dimpled back.

She dances with dragged *tacones.* I

accent my past tense,

to half-drunken *pegaditas*.

How it clenches the fragments

of her dark hips.

And if I am to be born out of wedlock, let it be

to the tune of Banda El Recodo’s

“*Vals de Alejandra.*”

Song’s a mournful riff. *Retumba tu corazón. Yet*

like *molcajete*, the trumpet blends

to hieroglyphs laced in my throat,

encased in passed down stone-grinders. My speech is

wedlocked onto an annulled diction. Tongue

housebroken to its border-fenced rivet.

But amidst all this, I assure her,

this language’s a rental.

My mestizaje is a tipsy waltz,

staggering across diphthongs. Pivoted double ‘r’s.

Her richochet-spanish,

caught me clotheslined. Sharp wind punctured my

sterile breath.

I soften my gaze to the way her lips curled,

to our everything.

And

while I

envisioned 1969--

ten-point programs,

guerilla uniforms,

cities under siege--

She dreamt of *papeles*, of filling her fridge

with over-the-counter dreams. Of

suburbia and manicured lawns. Of Marble-stone kitchens. Of

no longer waking at 4 am, *para tortillar*.

Of back-handed *machismo*, its policed womanhood.

So

when traditions weren’t looking,

she gives me crimsoned peck.

As the song embers down,

her nose nudges against mine.

Her

voice softly beating against my chest.

Whispering,

“*ya callate por favor,*

*mi amorcito.*

Zapata was a shameless womanizer.

And this isn’t the Liberation Army.

So please, let’s just dance.”

III

After the wedding reception, I tell her we have to make a stop.

“Where are we going,” she asks.

I say,

“To pay my respects.”

We finally pull along a roadside highway.

Tires grind ‘gainst the chalky gravel.

Outside the House in Ruins,

there’s a silence in the fields,

fertilized by petaled lashings.

*Coyote’s* switchblade to nativist backlash.

Farmland epitaph,

resigns its obituary--

‘till food don’t last.

On the front yard are

neatly stacked rows of *maíz.* Inside its bushels,

fanatic minutemen wield the Constitution

in one hand,

and semi-automatic hysteria on the other.

In cold cross-hairs, they watch my father

control his breath

underneath a gray pick up, whispering

*2 hours ‘till a better life*,

While counting his

falling I.V. sweat…

Outside the House in Ruins,

from just 1998-2004,

lies 1,954 small white crosses.

Of the men, women and children

that didn’t make it.

As their struggles incarnate, I

burlap-sack their remains,

a half- buried dream. I inhale

the same Juarez Desert my

the mother coughed.

I finally greet her,

offering her the streams of our wedding.

I kiss her bed,

*los siglos* ingrained in stone,

where my barefooted *reina*,

*ay mi reina, ya por fin*

lies to rest.

My mestizaje

is the shovel that splinters in my palms

as I excavate my past. I study its archeology

while my other half cries,

“Why are you showing me this now?”

I ad-dress my bride’s tattered garb,

still shimmering in white, pleading,

“Because…

before we dance,

I want her blessing.

And I can only receive it here.”

I guide her hand across the tombstone’s letters.

“In the

only land

that I’ve always known

to be mine.”