IV

_Returno a Mi Tierra Natal_

I

She is a middle aged mother.  
Hunched over, her eyes housing hallucinations.  
With feverish steps she stems,  
from fingerling her wounds.  
Held hostage by toxins,  
derpaid, 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  
3 days drive away.  
Her frail mother,  
with arthritic hands,  
opening

--an enclosed remittance.  
She hears  
_La Migra!_  
She hears  
_Strip!_ –  
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
*Tenochtitlán* – 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
evened 1969--
ten-point programs,
guerrilla 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 nudes 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.”