

EDITORS' COMMENTARY

“We Should Opt to be Turtles and Sing to One Another”: Protection, Community, Poetry

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At first glance the poems in this issue, by Raquel Gutiérrez and Luivette Resto, have little in common other than the fact they are written in verse, organized in lines and stanzas. Where Gutiérrez plays with abstraction, Resto invokes the quotidian. Where Gutiérrez looks out into the world, Resto's gaze is directed inward. But such easy dichotomies are belied by a careful reading of the poems themselves. Reading Gutiérrez and Resto together deepens the resonance of their common themes and commitments to writing that articulates the complexities of Latina subjectivity. Questions of memory, embodiment, and home thread these poems together thematically. Their poetic styles—the articulation of rhythm and idiom, image and narrative, allusion and idiosyncrasy—form the quality of each of their distinctive voices.

Luivette Resto's poems focus on ordinary details: domestic scenes of everyday intimacies and loss, of shame and of pride. They center on the ties between *mujeres en familia*—mother, tía, daughter, niece. In these poems, women's bodies are the bridges that stretch across generations. In “Painted Walls,” Resto writes of inheriting both the violent abuse visited on a mother and its attendant shame. At the same time, she also writes with grateful love about sharing “The Legendary Legs of the Rodriguez Women” and flashing “the smile we inherited” in “Diana's Elegy.” Memories of home and all that they entail, both alienation and comfort are made concrete in the material details

of a room: its paint, bricks, sounds, and framed pictures. In these poems Resto confronts the past, claims it, and remakes it with poetry.

Raquel Gutiérrez uses numbers in lieu of titles in the two poems published here, suggesting a serial quality to her work, like the chapters in a book. And while they evoke narrative, these poems evade plot. They are instead driven by a chain of insights and confessions. The abstractions invoked in #35 are tied to the body, to sex, and to “feeling bad” as fun. Gutiérrez asks us to consider the costs of our commitments to politics and to certainty, and to acknowledge the pleasures of danger: “Divining means touching / the fallen telephone wire.” For all of our intellectual engagements, the body persists. The two are interminably intertwined, as she writes in the opening lines of #60: “A woman versed in color theory / doubles over and never gets up.” Grief is tied to continuity, even in the face of alienation and the failure of community.

Resto and Gutiérrez articulate forms of Latina subjectivity that depends on a reciprocity between the self and other, between mujeres, and between the past and the present. They are engaged with a larger body of work by Chicana and Latina feminists that articulates and imagines a liberatory feminist poetics, in which identities and subjects are not articulated once and for all by the oppressive frameworks that organize our lives (white supremacy, heteropatriarchy and capitalism). Instead, these identities are articulated in different ways, according to the particular context and occasion, generating the kind of knowledge that is necessary for that particular moment (Alarcón; Sandoval, Rodríguez). To truly feel a sense of freedom, and perhaps to work towards it, for ourselves and for others, sometimes we need to grieve, and be lost, and feel bad. And at other times, we need to fight, and celebrate, and remember. And while communities may fail Gutiérrez within a particular poem, publication creates another kind of community in print, between

readers and writers. It is the work of the journal to create an archive of that community in these pages—building bridges between ourselves and to others, now and in the future.

References

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- Rodríguez, Juana María. 2003. *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces*. New York: New York University Press.
- Sandoval, Chela. 2000. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.