

BOOK REVIEW

flesh to bone

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flesh to bone. By Ire'ne Lara Silva. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2013. Pp. 172. \$14.95 (paper).

The dedication of Ire'ne Lara Silva's *flesh to bone* reads, "For my brother, Moisés quien, mejor que yo, conoce la oscuridad y la luz." While we cannot speak for Moisés, in this pivotal collection Silva deftly explores the darkness and the light—as well as, perhaps most significantly, the spaces in between—with such mastery of lyrical prose and inclusion of myth that it is impossible not to be swept into the world she presents to her reader. *flesh to bone* contains nine stories—"hunger/hambre/mayantli," "hiding-place," "cortando las nubes, or, death came on horses," "duérmete," "tecolotl," "thorn forest," "la huesera, or flesh to bone," "desembocada/the mouth of the river," and "the ocean's tongue"—that are poetic, haunting, and beyond captivating. Within the pages of this text, the dead not only walk among the living, but also interact with them directly, even sexually and homicidally. Words spew from characters' mouths in the form of vibrant paint. Women transform into birds of prey and wolves. Dry bones are resurrected as healthy flesh and blood. Figures such as *la Malinche*, *la Virgen*, and *la Llorona* are brought to life in contemporary settings. Vivid colors and light swarm together with timeless aromas and tastes, shadows and darkness, pain and survivance to remind us there is a place beyond pain of redemption and hope.

Silva moves seamlessly between English and Spanish, crossing borders, purposefully creating obscurity for some and illumination for others,

decentering hegemony and re-membering an Indigenous ontology, guiding us through a world where ancient ancestral story and contemporary Chicana realism are inextricable. The text calls to mind a 2014 interview with Juan Luis Guzmán for *Letras Latinas Blog*, where Silva explained, “I believe we have a fundamental need for myth. For stories that are larger than ourselves or our realities, for stories that speak to our culture(s), for stories that teach us something about life—to show us how wild and heart-breaking and beautiful it can be.” In *flesh to bone* she crafts such stories.

In the title story, Silva uses the story of *la huesera*, the Bone Woman, to interrogate violence against women, Indigenous and otherwise, that continues to this day. In the myth, the Bone Woman discovers remains of a starved and beaten young woman left to die alone in the wilderness. She collects skeletal fragments, singing life back into them: “Flesh to bone to blood to spirit to power. Beyond counting, the number of spirits I’ve rewoven, like the stars tossed in the sky, but this is where I began. Healing myself. Creating myself” (136). Here, ancient myth addresses contemporary concerns and provides both spiritual and political hope through speaking out against borderlands gender violence.

Silva’s *flesh to bone* reads like poetry, combining myth, fiction, and lyrical language to express a unity of experience impacting the reader not only mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, but also physically, evoking the salty taste of ocean and tears, the sound of *La Llorona*’s wail, and the pain of *La Malinche*. Silva harnesses the power of myth and contemporary experience that awakens readers within more than exposes them to her Chicana cosmology. In Silva’s own words, “To tell the stories of bones is to take a stance against erasure and amnesia as well as an acknowledgment that we are more than just our physical bodies. We are also our spiritual bodies, our emotional bodies, our psychological bodies—we are all of them at once and our bones remember everything” (Guzmán, 2014).

Silva's collection *flesh to bone* could serve as an integral component in both undergraduate and graduate curricula across various areas in cultural and literary studies and in creative writing. *flesh to bone* is a valuable contribution to Chicana literature and an important work for American literature more generally. Through her imaginative fiction, Silva has given us insight into how to remember, how to heal, how to transform our narratives, how to imagine, and perhaps most importantly, how to live.

References

- "La Huesera, The Bone Woman." 2014. *Singing Over the Bones*. <http://singingoverthebones.org/2014/09/30/la-huesera-the-bone-woman/>.
- Silva, Ire'ne Lara. Interview by Juan Luis Guzmán. 28 Jan 2014. *Letras Latinas Blog*. Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame. <http://letraslatinablog.blogspot.com/2014/01/juan-luis-guzman-interviews-irene-Lara.html>.