

REVIEW

La necesidad de desahogar nuestro duelo

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¡Ándale Prieta!, A Love Letter to My Family. By Yasmín Ramírez. New York: Cinco Puntos Press, August 2, 2022. Pp. 272. \$14.95 (paper).

As we discussed a new book for our course, La Chicana at the University of Texas at El Paso, Dra. Irma Montelongo and I decided we wanted to highlight the work of Yasmín Ramírez, a local author with a recently released memoir, *¡Ándale Prieta!, A Love Letter to My Family*. I read the book while flying cross-country to witness my niece graduate from an east-coast Ivy League school, a place where her experience was filled with disappointment, her identity as a Chicana stood out like a sore thumb, and, a space of much heartache, as we both grieved the loss of my mother, her grandmother, ten months prior. I will never forget each gasp for air, as the grieving knots in my throat were choked back, and tears ran down my face, knowing that my flight companions could not possibly understand la necesidad de desahogarme del duelo que estaba cargando en mi pecho. The loss of a loved one, such as a grandmother, or mother figure, compounds the grief in ways that only stories of pain can expose. Yasmín writes, “I think that many writers and storytellers believe that the stories that don’t want to be told—the ones that hurt down in the deep recesses of one’s soul or bring a wave of embarrassment and regret—are the ones that need to be shared” (254). I was grateful for her courageous decision to share her story of grief, love, and above all, the story of the chingonas in her life that shaped her identity in various ways.

Ándale Prieta, A Love Letter to My Family invites the reader to journey alongside Yasmín as she recalls the critical role that her grandmother played in her identity development—touching upon the complicated ways Chicana women are expected to perform within the dichotomous identities of La Malinche y La Virgen. The book is broken into two parts, *Finding Ita* and *Finding Yasmín*, filled with joy and pain and linked to various landmarks in El Paso, Texas. All of which resonated deeply with many of our La Chicana undergraduate students. Issues such as immigration, language, religion, and access to educational and career opportunities were all themes that one lives with day in and day out; when you live on a geopolitical borderland, seeing the physical barrier of El Rio Grande or the barbed wire fences that line the river between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez. While many of our students connected to the varied themes of the book, most connected through the concepts of grief.

The book skillfully interweaves the grief of the loss of a loved one with the grief of losing a relationship with a parental figure, and the loss of access to humane treatment, simply for being more prieta, or not speaking English without an accent. Our students, utilizing a personal photo essay assignment, shared some of their most painful and deeply loving stories about their experiences growing up on the border, and it was because, in this book, they were able to “see” themselves, sin vergüenza and without hesitation, se desahogaron el duelo de vivir en la frontera. Yasmín’s grief helped us grieve, through memories of música, comida, y consejos de las mujeres en nuestras vidas. I knew the book was a hit when some of our students reached out to her directly and wanted to know more about what happened with her relationship with her first boyfriend or with her father. It was in those moments that we knew that this book took the academic and theoretical groundwork, personalized it, and showed them how it appears in their daily

lives. That is the power of writing our personal stories, legitimizing them, and reminding students that, in the words of Ita, “Nunca cierres los ojos Prieta, eh? Tienes que estar lista porque nunca sabes de donde va venir un chingazo” (14). Our courses always come with a trigger warning, and our collective Chicana/o/x stories are often riddled with oppression, violence, and sadness as well as triumph, joy, and resilience. Our students consistently show up and demonstrate that they are always ready for the chingazos of life, regardless of where those chingazos come from.

