

Travelling

by

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*Always I am history I must wake to.
In idiot defeat I trace my routes
across a half-forgotten map of Texas.
I smooth out the folds stubborn
as the memory.*

“Haciendo apenas la recolección”
---Tino Villanueva

at dawn: the South
with caverns deep and gentle slopes
the echoes loud
of people new
and tears old

and next: the North
through blazing routes
and dampened sinews
that smell of sweat
of sweat and blood
the sweat of ma and blood of pa

and then: the West
my mum with sour sweet
her wisdom passed
and i met
with roaring cries
the tipsy girl

at dusk: the East
my turn to nurse
the daring seed

till dawn

When asked to come up with a creative reflection on my short, yet illuminating, contact with Chicana/o literature, I struggled with what would be appropriate to write. On the one hand, I was able to discern the political and societal aspect of Chicana/o literature which is linked with issues of ethnicity, race, gender and class, and on the other, I could not help but admire the aesthetic value that the plurality of narrative techniques offer. Inevitably, two queries have risen; how I am to approach a world which I am not a part of, and on a second level, what the focus of my poem should be, namely politics or aesthetics. The answer to my first query came from María Lugones's article "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception" where the writer proposes a "loving" travelling to other people's "worlds" as a way of identification with them. This is achieved through the "traveller's" understanding of "what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes. Only when we have travelled to each other's 'worlds' are we fully subjects to each other" (17). Thus, the world I chose to travel to was none other than my mother's and grandmother's, the latter being a migrant from Caucasus, rendering her offspring ethnic hybrids in their own right. Inspired by this idea of travelling and by Tino Villanueva's poem "Haciendo apenas la Recolección," where the poetic speaker embarks on a memory trip triggered by "a half-forgotten map of Texas" (6), I embarked on my own trip trying to "trace my routes" (5) on a distinctive map, namely the female body. Moving on to my second query, I have transmuted my initial concern to a much different question; whom am I writing for? At the time, I decided that I should first and foremost write for myself and then for whomever would like to read the poem. As a result, another issue has come up; what if no one understands? Should I offer an explanation or interpretation of the poem? To my doubts and queries on the topic Tino Villanueva kindly offered his insight as a poet and academic by saying:

As writers, we are our first readers. So I'm writing for myself at the very beginning of writing a poem. Next, it seems to me, we write for an audience sensitive to literature, moved by words and ideas. That audience is either a generic reader who reads literary/cultural magazines and journals or university/public school students required to take literature courses. But by and large I'm unaware, unmindful of

this in setting down a poem. Most of my concentration is in writing the best poem possible, so that it can be included in my next book—the best book possible. What is the task of the writer? I believe it was George Orwell who said that the task of the writer is to write a masterpiece each time. What the reader (audience) makes of a written text is up to the reader ... “Should we offer our own explanation?” you ask. Yes, but only an explanation, not an interpretation, which is different. This issue was addressed a long time ago by Dr. Samuel Johnson in England in the 18th century. He himself says it: that a writer should not interpret his own work, but only offer an explanation of things.¹

This is, therefore, my own explanation of the poem/travelling you have just read.

Works Cited

- Lugones, María. “Playfulness, ‘World’-Travelling, and Loving Perception.” *Hypatia*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1987, pp. 3-19. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3810013. Accessed 24 Apr. 2020.
- Villanueva, Tino. “Haciendo apenas la recolección.” *Shaking Off the Dark*. Bilingual Press, 1998, pp. 49-50.

¹ Tino Villanueva’s response, cited with permission above, is part of a thread of emails I exchanged with the poet on November 3, 2021. Encouraged by Dr. Emmanouilidou, I reached out to Tino Villanueva in an attempt to share my doubts, concerns and reflections on poetry writing with someone who could guide and mentor my thought process. I am grateful to Tino Villanueva not only for writing a poem that inspired my own composition, but also for replying to my complicated and long queries.