Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Gustavo Hernandez: Four Poems

Gustavo Hernandez · Thursday, September 2nd, 2021

FORMAS FINALES

The steam train headed west from Atotonilco had departed long ago. The one my father sometimes jumped on as it slowed on a hill. Tired

child. The path lacking modern guides, lacking guardrail and colonial arch. Electricity was holy. Was softer. Was circuits of moonlight. And the mothers' gold-embroidered hemlines

hovered closer when coyote rustled in the brush, when rock loosened on the hillside. He prayed to Our Holy Mother of San Juan de los Lagos. Her crown with angels spinning like weather

vanes, the knives that ended her mortal life long ago melted into a hydraulic crescent at her feet. All over, stars counted down toward the dawn. And a soft voice said I will try to protect you

as long as I can. Let me hold your hand, Juan. If only while you and your children and theirs begin to learn the sky's machinery.

*

CLAPBOARD

In second grade I winged definitions because I couldn't find a dictionary among the hand-me-downs people left in the house we moved into.

I described a wallet best I could: the loose crease, the torn corners. Fruit only shapes and colors absent continents

of origin. The house on Spruce with its two rooms for seven people never promised more than what it first contained,

but taught us to create space—knees on the green carpet with a notebook split open on the edge of a mattress,

prayer and sewing taken up at the kitchen table. Rough shingles, drumming rain gutters. In a way a house

never stops protecting us. I can still see its lamp shorting out, and my family walking in the dark, feeling

our way around. Doing pretty well.

*

A WHITE BOY APOLOGY

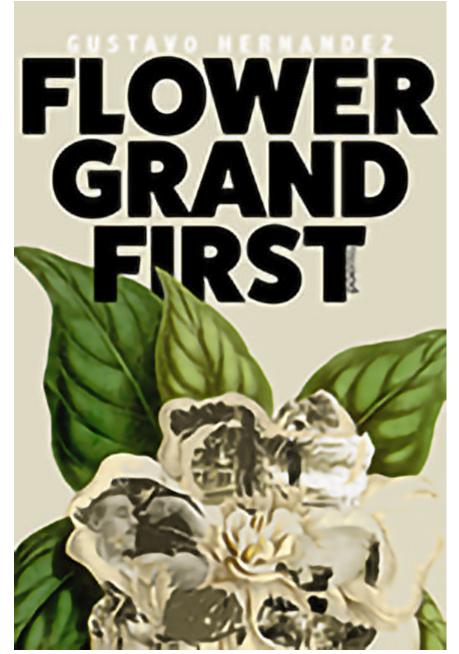
I don't know what's going on at home, but February and rain pool on the lawn of every county school miles around, pricked and stirred gray. I am a weak glint carried through these valleys, snow on the tip of the San Gabriels, another one of California's halfmouthed phrases, a boy hanging out with girls born in the foxglove of only one landscape. They all say origins don't have to matter. That now there is one set of roads. I don't know what's going on at home. Where you are, mother and father. Noon and dusk are indistinguishable. I don't know which pink or purple bell will spring from the ground in a month. If the songbirds are gone

or if they're nesting.

*

THIRD SHIFT

I told a gas station attendant that I loved you. It was 2 a.m. You were still at work and the roadside blooms blew their scent to me. Staggered, blinking, the stars were all harp strings plucked on navy and black—notes descending, dissolving, shy and disappearing over the coronet of our mountains. By this time, my courage had been spent in a ribbon-white rush. In a hotel room whose backcloth was the steady voice of a late night talk show host. Spent on the salt and fur of a stranger's chest. And only then did I long for home, for the muted tick of our kitchen clock. Only then was your factory work heavy upon me, the blonde and the gray of your roughening face.



Flower Green First by Gustavo Hernandez. Purchase.

This entry was posted on Thursday, September 2nd, 2021 at 6:57 am and is filed under Poetry You can follow any responses to this entry through the Comments (RSS) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.