

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Imagination is the Ultimate Haunted House

Ashley Estrada · Wednesday, June 1st, 2016



Myriam Gurba's book of short stories, *How Some Abuelitas Keep Their Chicana Granddaughter's Still While Painting Their Portraits in Winter*, reveals a mind of lyrical metaphors and short stories of many pasts. Published by Manic D Press, Gurba takes you along through many delightful short stories and metaphors beyond anybody's imagination. The author deftly showcases stories of past lives and the ghosts of a Mexican family. We encounter phrases that leave so much emotion on the paper.

Under A Paint Brush

As Abuelita paints, the stories unfold under a paint brush. She paints of sisters left at an orphanage, of a family who seems to be always grief stricken and even more so when Abuelita's strings of life were pulled, "We'd screamed and wept and invoked God as a family right after Abuelita quit pulling strings." With death playing a major role in these stories, you are captivated by the spirits wanting to be seen. As a Mexican grandfather finds himself in graveyard — a non-believer — he awaits the lost lives to appear and feast only to allow himself to come to the realization "the dead were coming to town and they were bringing mortal appetites."

Many of the stories are linked together to create one story of beautiful language and poetry, while other stories stand alone and hold just as much knowledge of Gurba's true raw and cultured writing. The many tales I've heard being Mexican-American with only Spanish speaking grandparents allowed me to read the stories my ears once heard during my childhood. It was not of the stories of flowers nor of butterflies, but of the stories a Mexican grandmother would tell her ten grandchildren when they misbehaved. The fear of "the ghost who killed her babies" whom we referred to as "La llorona." Many sorrowful versions of the story are alive and as the merciful drownings occur, the children are not.

The story is of a woman who was cheated on by her husband and in order to get revenge she took things that belonged to him, led them down to the river banks and let the kicking and thrashing begin. As children die with moist lungs, bubbles arrive on the surface of the water and the smile of death is elating.

Poetry Spilled Across the Page

The book was unlike anything I have ever read and it was a refreshing way to see literature in a different light for me. Through the poetry spilled across many pages, the Spanish poems allowed me to understand the importance of staying with my Mexican roots and truly learn to appreciate my language. I appreciated the stories being based on Mexican culture and the stories we were told as children also allowed me to learn more about myself as I related to each one.

As the book is merely based upon stories of death, I tried to set my experience of death aside as it still weighed heavily on me. I allowed myself to not be disturbed by the words on the pages but to understand the context of the story rather than just turning the page. It brought up a lot of emotion

that I had tried to dismiss as Death is not a joyous feeling, our family became ghosts. Myriam Gurba reminds us that, "ghosts colonize the imagination. Imaginations are the ultimate haunted houses."

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