Cultural Daily

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Mariano Zaro: Three Poems

Mariano Zaro · Tuesday, December 13th, 2016

Mariano Zaro is the author of four bilingual books of poetry: *Where From/Desde Donde, Poems of Erosion/Poemas de la erosión, The House of Mae Rim/La casa de Mae Rim* and *Tres letras/Three Letters*. Most recently, *Buda en llamas/Buddha in Flames*, his Spanish translation of Tony Barnstone's selected poems, has been published in Mexico by El Tucán de Virginia. Zaro's poems have been included in the anthologies *Monster Verse* (Penguin Random House), *Wide Awake* (Beyond Baroque, Venice, CA), The Coiled Serpent ((Tía Chucha Press, San Fernando, CA) and in several magazines in Spain, Mexico and the United States: *Luces y Sombras* (Tafalla, Spain), *La Peste* (México D.F.), *Askew* (Ventura, CA), *Diálogo* (DePaul University, Chicago), Zócalo Public Square (Arizona State University) and *Tupelo Quarterly* (Finalist of the Tupelo Quarterly Inaugural Poetry Contest, Tupelo Press).

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At His House

He snores, I look at him.
He wakes up.
I did not cry as much today, he says.
The dogs bark outside, a plane goes by.
We want to believe that everything is as usual.
There is a painting on the bedroom wall—
a small bird carrying a box, a big box.
It has always been there, since I met him.
Today the box looks too heavy.

He eats the cheese and the crackers
against the doctor's orders.
I am not looking.
Then he needs to go to the bathroom.
He is too frail.
He does not make it.
I clean him.
You always wanted a piece of my ass,

he says.
The humor is still alive.

I open the window, wash my hands, take out the trash.
Come back. Wash my hands again.
I feel guilty when I wash my hands the third time.
And then he asks me questions.
I close the window to gain some time.
I don’t know what to say.
I don’t know what helps him more—
what I tell him, what I hide.
Maybe nothing can help.

He falls asleep again,
snores louder than we could expect
from a body like that.

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Old Petra

Old Petra lives alone at the end of the street
with a pet monkey named Ximo.
He is an inheritance.
Petra wears long black skirts.
Ximo is a well-dressed monkey.
She makes vests for him: forest green corduroy,
gray satin with pearl buttons, denim,
studded black leather.
Ximo was the mascot of a rock band.
Petra’s son was the lead singer.

She still has a faded poster in the living room.
The Ximos—five men with long hair,
tight pants, a drum set and a monkey.
They had a bad car accident one night.
I think somebody died.
Ximo still remembers the accident.
That’s what Petra says.
Some days he hides in a corner,
shivering, for no reason.

We children go to visit Old Petra,
just to play with the monkey.
We give him peanuts, sunflower seeds,
candy that he crushes with his pointy teeth.
Ximo rubs his ears, as if cleaning something
impossible to clean. He is almost deaf.

Too many concerts tied to the loudspeakers,
Petra tells us.

We give him apples cut in quarters.
We cover small pebbles
with candy wrapping, give them to him.
He drops them like dead birds.
Nobody can fool this monkey, Petra says.
He looks at us with human eyes,
without blinking.

Ximo often escapes
through the kitchen balcony
and Old Petra climbs to the roof.
Ximo, Ximo, she calls him.
The neighbors open the windows,
we gather around the house.

Come down Petra, we say, *come down.*
She walks on the roof with arms stretched out,
like a frail marionette.
Come down crazy Petra, somebody says.

She gets mad, Old Petra. She reaches inside
her skirt pockets and throws clothespins,
old pieces of bread, wads of Kleenex
that don't reach the ground.

One day she threw a dirty fork
and then lifted her skirt,
opened her legs and peed on the roof.

Move away, my friends told me.
But I didn't move. I wanted to be close.

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Figs

I planted this fig tree the day you were born,
my father tells me.
The tree is tall, abundant, with dense shade.
It's my twin brother.

When in season, I bring figs to friends and neighbors.
Figs organized in concentric circles,
on a tray that my mother lines with fig leaves.
I also bring figs to my Uncle Santiago.
Don't knock at his front door, go through the garage,
my father says. My mother does not put the figs

on the tray, she puts then inside a paper bag.

My Uncle Santiago is diabetic.
You are killing him. He cannot eat figs, his wife says.
I deliver the figs through the garage.
He is waiting. *Thank you for the contraband*, he says.
He gives me a coin, kisses the top of my head.
He eats the figs right there, in the garage,
without turning the lights on.
He opens the figs' skin with his thumbnail.

My Uncle Santiago is not my uncle. We call him uncle because
he grew up with my father.
My grandmother breastfed both of them.
And somehow they look alike, my father and Santiago—
tall, soft grey eyes, quiet.

Your fig tree is sick, my father says one summer.
He also says the word *fungus.*

The tree looks normal but when you turn the leaves
you can see little white spots, in clusters.
I go with my father to the pharmacy,
we buy some kind of powder; my father mixes it with water.
We cannot spray the tree now, it's too hot, my father says.
We have to wait until the sun goes down.

After we spray, the tree leaves start dripping—
a small, toxic rain that hits the ground. *Stay away*, my father says.
I ask, *Is the tree dying?*
Everything that breathes is dying, he says.

Could we plant another tree? I ask.
We could, but it takes a long time until it bears fruit.
Years. You will plant your trees one day, my father says.
My limbs feel heavy. I press my arms alongside my body.
I want to go home. Hide.
I don't want my father to wait in vain.

(This poem first published in Pinyon 2016 Commemorative Issue (Mesa State College))

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