

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Poetry Mini Interview: Adrian Ernesto Cepeda by Thomas Whyte

Thomas Whyte · Wednesday, January 16th, 2019

1. *Has your consideration of poetry changed since you began?*

When I first started writing poems I would write when inspiration came to me. Now I realize, for me, being a true poet is to always be ready and not wait. My philosophy is akin to people who workout every day. The first thing I do in the morning is write poetry. I need to flex my creative muscle. My morning poems are not always a success but that one poem usually always leads to breakthrough a day or week later. Poetry for me is more than just a career, it is my calling, whenever I am stressed out or something seriously is troubling me, every time I pen a verse, poetry gives me answers when I needed it most. It's more than just writing. Poetry is my calling, my reason for living, every day on the page.

2. *What poets changed the way you thought about writing?*

The poets that truly have influenced and made me see that poetry is an artform are Pablo Neruda. His *100 Love Sonnets* was a revelation that a poet can pen his desires, his longings, his amor on the page and it could connect with some so close to your corazón. Poets like Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath and Anais Nin, these poets and writers have opened a new world, of honest, body, spirit and mind poetry that cuts deep and truly resonates with me. Even modern erotic love poets like Kim Addonizio, Dylan Krieger, Alexis Rhone Fancher and Amber Decker inspire me with their timeless carnal verses. They make me realize that it's not just about skin to skin, not just the act but the movement, the touches, the voice, the body of the poem that reflects the cravings that connect with the reader on the page.

Sandra Cisneros and Juan Felipe Herrera have also influenced me, as their poems have inspired me to reconnect with my Latino culture. Some of my new poems code switch and use both Spanish and English. I feel like I am finding new shades of myself writing these new Spanish flavored poems and this is thanks to poets like Cisneros and Herrera. I know that Cisneros is known for her prose, but her poems, to me, reflect not just her own experiences but are like a mirror into my own life.

Tiana Clark, Leila Chatti and Kaveh Akbar. These three are champions of modern American verse as they pen the most dynamically inspiring poems reflecting own unique cultural voice. Clark, Chatti and Akbar are the three poets these days that are lighting the spark and inspiring me to go

deeper and reflect my own story. Every time I read one of their poems it's like a creative eruption occurs inside me as their lines, stanzas, breaks and themes inspire me to go deeper by challenging me to create and craft poems that show more of a piece of myself and my own universe. What poets like Tiana, Leila and Kaveh have taught me is that the personal is universal, no matter what your story, your voice you craft in your poem, the more personal, the more it will reflect and connect with reader on and off the page.

3. *How does a poem begin?*

For me it begins with an image, a sound, a line or a picture. I often come up with ideas for poems when I am stuck in traffic. Since I live in LA and this happens almost every day on my way to work, having a notebook and a pen is handy when inspiration strikes you. I've always said, when inspiration calls, no matter where you are, you got to accept the charges. So, when a line or an idea comes into my head, I write it down. Usually some of the best poems come to life like this. One poem, "Book Like A Woman," from my poetry collection *Flashes & Verses* was actually written in the parking lot of a famous bookstore in Pasadena. "Her only Light in Vegas" was penned during a stay on the strip, passing the slot machines, I spent all weekend crafting that one poem in our hotel room. "Living Next to Henry Miller" was inspired by a *Los Angeles Magazine* byline that I saw waiting in line at Sprouts while I was buying groceries. I started jotting down a few lines and when I got home I looked up the article and was disappointed on what I read. So, I wrote a poem what I imagined what it would be like living next to Miller. For me a poem is always just around the corner. I don't ever want to miss the chance of transcribing a poem that will change my life. Eddie Vedder said it best. "I just try to remember where that initial spark came from, and it's like a pilot light, and I try to make sure that thing doesn't go out." As a poet you don't want to ever let that light go out. Follow any inclination and let that poem begin to come to life on your age.

4. *What is the importance of reading poetry aloud in front of an audience?*

Because I stutter, I feel like I have a duty to go out into the world and share my poems by showing promising poets that if I can do it, stand up here read my verses and stuttering through each one, you can succeed to. I was speaking to a poet a few days ago and she is a published poet who had never read her poems aloud. Going out and reading your poems is so important. Yes, it's frightening but it's also empowering for yourself and the audience. I am lucky to be able to spend the valuable hours I have left on the planet doing the thing that I love. Crafting, Writing, Revising and Reading my poetry. My advice to any young poet, go to readings and read your poems on stage in front of a crowd. It is life changing.

I remember the moment, in the middle of a poetry reading in Burbank, as I read the poem "She Pours Me With Her Eyes" included in my poetry book *Flashes & Verses*, I felt my voice becoming one with my words. Even though I was terrified, the moment changed everything for me. I discovered my calling in life. A few years later I was accepted into the MFA program at Antioch University Los Angeles. And five years after acquiring my MFA, after having over a hundred poems published, my first full-length poetry collection was published this year. All this happened because I faced my fears and went up behind the microphone and read that poem. My future changed the moment I spoke up and read my poem. For those that have the nerve to question the

power of poetry. Poetry saved me and changed my life. What are you waiting for? That poem you are scared to read might just change your life. Step up and let your voice be heard on and off the page. On the stage is where I found my voice. And I am loving the sound.

5. *What are you working on?*

Currently, I am working on a manuscript on poems for my Mami. My mother passed away in November. It's been so difficult because for years she was a champion of my poetry. She gave me the gift of la poesia. And now that my first chapbook, *So Many Flowers, So Little Time*, has been published for Red Mare and my full-length poetry collection *Flashes & Verses...Becoming Attractions* just released, published by Unsolicited Press, she is not here to see my books come to life. For years, I sent my Mami poems for her birthday and Christmas. My Papi gave me an envelope of those poems and I've written so many more since her passing, I am putting them together in a book in her honor. Still needs work. Mother's Day was tough for me. So many milestones of mourning left for the first year. It is slowly coming together but not ready.

In the meantime, I have two manuscripts of erotic love poems that I am editing and ready to shop around. Poems that would be perfect for couples to share. The themes of these collections reflect Lawrence Ferlinghetti who once famously said, "Poetry is a naked woman, a naked man, and the distance between them." This is where my creative voice comes in, trying to reach my reader somewhere between imagination, fantasy and desire.

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