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Review: *Posada* by Xochitl-Julisa Bermejo

Cherisse Yanit Nadal · Thursday, August 24th, 2017

Xochitl-Julisa Bermejo, in her full-length poetry manuscript *Posada: Offerings of Witness & Refuge*, evoked feelings whose names I searched for as a teenager whenever I entered the sanctuary of the churches. But where, in church, I never felt what I thought I was supposed to feel, there is something in Bermejo's unrelenting voice in *Posada* that brought me toe-to-toe with the spirits that she references. There is something sacred about the repetition of Chavez Ravine, 1949 as an invocation of place for many of the poems in this collection. Here it is more than a ritornello or variation on a theme, but a ritual visitation that frames a history and provides a place for artifacts that hold memory.

 *Posada* is separated into four parts. The first part of the collection pays particular attention to home and family. The images evoked are photographs, food eaten inside of houses, and tools brought across borders to represent home or are images of the neighborhoods in Los Angeles that provide the terra firma of home. The second part of the collection seems to focus on the body of woman. The rendering of womanhood here is done largely through a self-examining voice calibrated with and against the world and people surrounding the speaker. The third section of the collection is written to be a survival guide made up of facts, tips, and observations that recalled for me my childhood Bible lessons on Exodus and Leviticus in its unapologetic recollections of the Tucson desert and its clear, unencumbered references to NoMoreDeaths.org. The fourth section of the collection deepens this in its descriptions of Bermejo's experiences as a volunteer with NoMoreDeaths.org. What was particularly moving about this final section was the call for basic human dignity juxtaposed against the declarations of love for the desert.

Readers will come away from this collection having borne witness to a self-exploration, see the U.S. – Mexico Border through the eyes of a writer whose family claims home on both sides of an arbitrary line, and leave the collection knowing the meaning of the words sanctuary and refuge. Readers will also reach the end of this collection to the words, “*We’re friends here. You’re safe.*”

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