

# The Journal of Pedagogy and Creativity



CATCH THE NEXT





# ***The Journal of Ideas and Creativity***

A Journal Created for and By the Catch the Next Community

**Co-Editors: Rafael Castillo and Erin Doran**

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Cover Art: Conocimiento 2

Artist: Liliana Wilson

With a mathematics book in one hand and the sun on the other, this student possesses the academic and spiritual forms of intelligence needed to succeed. These tools will open the young girl's heart and mind to connect with her inner world of values, intuition and meaning and her outer

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# Essays

## Meeting the Challenge of the CTN Ascender Program at Dallas Community College

By Laura Flores

The CTN (Catch the Next) *Ascender Program* has truly transformed Dallas Community College, creating a sense of community and support that extends from our relationships with our professional peers to the warmth and care of our classroom students. Students, faculty, and staff have all been touched by this transformation, forming a vast *familia*. Families are safe spaces where members champion one another and celebrate the small joys along the way. And like all families, we acknowledge occasional challenges that must be addressed.

These occasional challenges are part of the everyday experience of family life and impact the educational trajectory of Dallas College students. As they say, “Life gets in the way” when going to college, and those challenges are part and parcel of any college experience in the United States.

As a senior manager for the CTN Ascender program in the last three academic semesters, I have had the opportunity to glean from what we do well and dream of what we can grow to become in the journey. This is why having continued access to professional development opportunities through *Catch the Next* is vital. The fall and spring seminars provide faculty and staff with a continuous pedagogical support system. Sitting and sharing ideas with these visionaries during these trainings is both transformative and empowering.

The 2024 Spring Seminar was nothing less than excellent. I cannot advocate for these opportunities enough. Sessions provided tangible takeaways for our faculty and highlighted diverse authors and readings. Faculty felt refreshed and equipped to return to their classrooms and approach their students differently, and that was amazing to witness.

As for myself, I also left feeling refreshed and re-energized as one always does, but more so encouraged. I was encouraged because I realized that Dallas Community College isn't so far off from being successful. *We are successful*. Hearing about growing pains from other institutions taught me that we all grow in increments. What Dallas Community College has accomplished in two years is impressive, yet sometimes, it's hard to acknowledge with the buzz of all the challenges ringing in your ear. Yet, we are transforming our students' lives in one way or another. We may not realize it, but it's happening.

This week, I've been blessed to meet CTN Ascender students at our campuses, and they've attested to the feeling of being cared for and not feeling like they're "just a number." Our faculty have all begun gaining trust in the program, *Catch the Next*, leadership, and spreading the word about what we do. Slowly but surely, we are growing.

As we wrap up the semester, I look forward to utilizing the summer season to work on faculty relationship building, enhanced communications between all stakeholders, and increased student engagement. Student engagement is the linchpin of any successful organization. Dallas Community College is working hard to meet those earmarks of success and meet the student needs that reflect our diverse urban community. Nonetheless, the work never stops, and I am happy to carry that work forward.

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Laura Flores is a Project Manager for the CTN Ascender Program at Dallas Community College.

## **Pursuing el Sueño Americano**

By Diana Gorostieta

Attending the 2024 March CTN (Catch the Next) *Ascender* Spring Seminar in McAllen, Texas, marked the culmination of my odyssey, bringing things full circle. By full circle, I refer to my journal from when I was a CTN student and now am a CTN instructor. As an alumna, I gained insights into how the activities I participated in as a student profoundly impacted student success.

As part of the obligatory popcorn readings, we read a short story aloud and shared our interpretations as a group. We read aloud to each other for solid lines—the lines from the story that leaped at us and gave meaning and significance to our experience. Then, we reconvened and gave our interpretations. This process has been the foundation of CTN since its inception. The interpretations are integral in understanding student perspectives and innate understanding of these stories.

The story centered around an immigrant child who took the initiative to find his father across the border, driven by his family's need for financial support. As I read, I felt a sudden wave of emotion from my viscera, recalling my immigrant story and the sacrifices my parents made for a better future. It was the universal struggle for survival and pursuing el sueño Americano, the American dream.

Although some professionals in my group hadn't undergone these experiences, they shared their perspectives and acknowledged feeling confused and disconnected from the story. This is perfectly natural. They recognized the parallels about how some students might feel alienated in college, stressing the importance of such training in fostering understanding and support for diverse student populations. Sometimes, reading stories from different cultural backgrounds



makes readers uncomfortable, but that is the point of education—exploring new ideas, discovering worlds, and feeling new vistas.

I was amazed at how a simple reading exercise could provide profound insights and elemental discussions. It took me back to my student days when similar reading activities sparked meaningful conversations. In high school, I found reading and writing less enjoyable than math. It wasn't that I could grasp the concepts, but expressing myself in English—especially in the context of Renaissance literature, such as Shakespeare and other predominantly white authors— was a challenge.

However, my perspective shifted when I enrolled in the *Ascender* ENGL 1301 and ENGL 1302 and discovered the work of Sandra Cisneros. She's a remarkable writer who mirrors Mexican American culture with nostalgia and a familiarity that most Latinos and the working-class experience when confronted by the dominant society. Exposure to more diverse authors allowed me to feel more at ease with my writing and incorporate Spanish phrases into my essays.

A few years ago, I stumbled across my English academic essays. I realized the significance and impact of those courses. Since then, I have kept those essays safe in a folder over the past eight years as a testament to their power and a reminder of the power of reading and writing. This journey has shaped my writing and made me feel a part of a *familia* dedicated to serving students and effecting positive change in their educational journeys, filling me with immense pride.

Leaving the seminar, I felt inspired and reassured that my work as a professional is driven by passion and a commitment to making a difference. Incremental change, regardless of size, is significant because it can improve a student's educational trajectory. Although more work is needed, I look forward to continuing as a Leadership Fellow and leading students and colleagues

into higher plateaus.

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Diana Gorostieta Martinez is an Austin Community College Ascender alumna, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipient, and first-generation Latina with a Master of Science in Business Administration. Dedicated to encouraging other students to pursue their educational goals, she now serves as the Outreach Coordinator for the Ascender program under the Office of Student Affairs at ACC.

## **Sometimes, Inequality Engenders Unreasonable Issues in Education**

By Armando Sanchez

After assisting program seminars and attending the 2024 Fall Ascender Seminar for *Catch the Next*, Stella M. Flores's presentation resonated with me because she made good arguments regarding equity and how educational equity policy (in the era of inequality) is an essential factor in not just guiding future leaders to an impactful and successful future but also contributing to society's overall improvement.

Flores's presentation continues with how vital equity is in improving a community and culture and how significant equity is in policymaking. She emphasizes the importance of equity from an economic perspective and how discrimination towards a community, such as the African-American community, has resulted in the economy losing \$16 trillion. Similarly, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals—known as DACA—was enacted under the Obama administration in 2012; the program has allowed around 850,000 recipients to temporarily stay off deportation and work authorization. I am continuing Flores's economic approach to equity. The same concept can be applied to DACA and how DACA recipients can and have contributed to American society's economic growth.

Through Flores' concept of equity, this program has opened the door for the 850,000 individuals who seek a better life for themselves and their families and contribute to the betterment of society by allowing them to pursue higher education, become homeowners, and earn higher wages.

Alongside earning higher wages comes more tax revenue and economic growth for their communities and nationwide. Nationally, DACA recipients and their households make significant economic and fiscal contributions each year. 2 CAP analysis finds that DACA recipient

households pay \$6.2 billion in federal taxes and \$3.3 billion in state and local taxes yearly. <sup>2</sup> This also makes them critical for local economies where, after taxes, these households hold \$25.3 billion in spending power, which they use this spending power to pay mortgage payments and rental payments.

Through the understanding of Flores's idea of equity, society improves through the betterment of individuals and society, and the program also brings an essential factor that can arguably be the critical factor of American culture, which helps drive America forward: economic growth. This connects back to how equity plays a significant role in policymaking. DACA has brought the betterment of American society and those individuals under the program, not to mention the economic growth that has come along with it. This makes the argument that equity is significant in policy making, and discussing what's going on with DACA in the courts lately makes the argument that if DACA were to be terminated, it would significantly impact the American economy.

In the final analysis, equity should be carefully considered when making policy-making decisions; we should discuss data when arguing about DACA and how it significantly impacts the American economy and its growth. Equity does bring the betterment of American society. Still, it also brings along the betterment of the American economy, where America values money as a precious factor. It should consider the future of DACA and related policy issues when focused on a specific community.

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Armando Sanchez is a first-generation DACAmented student from Ixtapan de la Sal, Mexico. Armando has achieved his associate's, bachelor's, and his biggest achievement: a Master of Arts in Political Science at Texas State University. He looks forward to the future as he does his best to make a difference in the world, ensuring he does his best to make his parents proud for all of the sacrifices they have made for him, giving him the world, and reminding him to keep his head up no matter how cruel the world may be.

# **Book Reviews**



*When Montezuma Met Cortes: A True Story of The Meeting That Changed History*

Harpers Collins Ecco Press,

ISBN:0062427261

ISBN13:9780062427267

2019 paperback

pp 509. \$22.00

By Julian S. Garcia

A universal cliché among history professors is that history is told by the victors, not the losers. Ever since Thucydides and Herodotus described the major accounts of Greek sea battles, empire conquests and dire colonization, they have always been told from the vantage point of the conquerors. Mathew Restall's brilliant re-examination in *When Montezuma Met Cortés* articulates how certain versions are foregrounded with alternative history because lesser accounts were not given historical weight as the victors' perspective are perpetuated through history and maintained as the dominant telling, even though it is clearly one-sided.

Restall maintains that the true story has been discounted and displaced in Mesoamerica's encounters with European conquistadors. He gives readers an interesting buildup before he centers on Tenochtitlan and the Mexica Empire as the conflict begins with corrective accounts from eye-witness narrators who give testimony between the Spanish Empire meeting with the Mexica's Emperor Montezuma and the Conquistador Hernan Cortez. Cortez himself is viewed as a power-hungry adventurer whose thirst for conquest and blood was not only contrary to the wishes of the Spanish crown, but flagrantly doing injustices to the native populations. Even fray De Las Casas, a prominent Jesuit priest, documented the actions of the conquistadors with a counternarrative.

Restall illustrates example after example from diary accounts of soldiers and indigenous groups who saw the carnage and bloodshed Cortez had unleashed as massacres of villages before reaching Tenochtitlan and the heart of the Mexica Empire. He gives an account how other historical passages of history give similar accounts of bloodshed and mayhem as empire subdues lesser nations, all plausible and closer to truth. Indeed, Matthew Restall sets the stage in reconsidering other historical myths and familiar European and American narrations as they colonized and conquered American indigenous territories predicting what Winfield Scott's union troops did before entering Mexico City giving historical gravitas to what Cortez and his men had done centuries earlier. The narrative of conquerors is always to set up as heroism of battle and

the nobility of the European over the indigenous, even if the account is riddled with fantasy and falsity as the Texas Republic was set up as a slave state.

These narratives and designs are nothing new for clear-minded historians but newsworthy for readers wanting insights into how history can be manipulated and maintained as true accounts of the puzzle have been repressed or discounted. Many historical documents have been designed and perpetuated as nation-building projecting a heroic tale of European conquerors subduing fewer worthy opponents, who are presented as savage and contrary to the European notion of civilization and higher order. Generations of school children have been indoctrinated in the Eurocentric perspective of how civilization is viewed from the vantage of power and white privilege to the extent that empire control the free press, and publishers perpetuate an ideology of conquests for the betterment of humanity. Mathew Restall gives readers examples of historical falsification in real time diachronically and synchronically. His investigative research and narrative efforts dive into the deep hidden annals of Spanish Conquest documents, uncovering authors neglected by history because their versions did not match or sided with the given dominant narrative of Cortez as a great conqueror who only wanted to spread Christianity and civilization to the savage indigenous empires.

For advocates of the dominant narrative history, American imperialism was a perfect time to flex their muscles and show their military forceful might as manifest destiny fervor was blowing upstream across the Mississippi River to all the natives of a soon-to-be occupied America. Historical forces create winners and losers. And losers are subjected to oppressor standards justifying brutalities and confiscation of territory, thereby dominating the rhetoric of a pseudo-history by the victors. Historical characters such as La Malinche are well described and elaborated by Restall as plausible victims because of her fortitude and betrayal of her countrymen. Hernan Cortéz, as well as other Spanish Conquistadors and Viceroyes, are portrayed as willing actors in the stage of history as opportunists wanting aggrandizement and wealth at the expense of indigenous tribes and conquered subjects, as documented by Matthew Restall.

Mathew Restall excavated and deciphered ancient Spanish letters, diaries, and historical documents, keeping an eye on literature and the arts as European painters sought to give credence to the Conquest as a romantic intervention of civilization versus the dark powers of uncivilized disorder as represented by indigenous Americas. His sleuthing eyes and vigorous interpretation give a fresh account and the plausibility of interventions by the Empire's Crown and Vatican's intentions and elaborate schemes of usurping valuable minerals and indigenous souls in the most brutal ways and terrorist ways.

Reading about the outrages rumors and stereotypes penned and noted by these civilized Catholic overlords and denigrating the Mexica, Mayan, and Inca Empires as pagan savage weak barbaric cultures deserving guidance from Church and the Spanish Crown is laid out in a solid rhetorical style that gives readers an alternative account of how history, art, literature and power all collude to reinforce and perpetuate empire as deserving and restoring order to disorder. A wealth of

pictographs Restall produces in each chapter an abundance of images and important art strategic placed in the Rotunda of the White House in Washington D.C. as the ceiling of the Vatican can attest also gives a special nod and approval of conquest and domination. The book is a must read for those willing to read how the tales of Thucydides and Herodotus have never been displaced as history is the story told by victors until historians like Matthew Restall enter the fray giving readers a fresh perspective.

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Julian S. Garcia is an independent scholar and writer whose writings and fiction have appeared in Saguaro Review, Regeneración (University of New Mexico), Puentes Review (Texas A&M-Corpus-Christi), Southwest Tales (Maize Press), and opinion-editors in San Francisco Chronicle, San Antonio Express-News, and Associated Press.

# **Creative Works: Flash Fiction and Short Stories**

## **The Perfect Story**

By Alex Salinas

He is hungry.

The sky is massive and gray, with an unbeatable Soviet fortress and a quilt of Confederate generals' uniforms smiling for the first and last time today.

Since last week's car crash, he has written one clean sentence. He is reasonably healthy. If someone were to ask him how he's faring, he would not highlight the positives (for instance, landing on the right word to complete said sentence, a miracle every time it happens, a complex joy). His pops will outlast him by seven years—and always, he feels his cement gaze on his thin shoulders.

Kafka Francisco is away from home in Amerika, yet he will never know his home country. Although hungry, he drives five miles under the speed limit, enwrapped in two tons of rental Japanese plastic and steel—sufficient to demolish any pedestrian. A motorcyclist in the fast lane blazes past him, doing at least a hundred. Where's the long arm of the law when you need someone to smash him out of sight like a cockroach?

Kafka F. has ten dollars in his tattered wallet. Money damn well earned, all things considered—McDonald's it is.

If Richard Milhous Nixon could eat cottage cheese and ketchup for breakfast, then Kafka could treat himself to a lunch rich in sodium and preservatives. Dead is forever, requiring courage to keep a live heart thriving. The rattle in his chest isn't loose change—he is monetarily covered, for now, against the reaches of the golden empire upon which the sun's rays have not yet abandoned.

He cannot decide what to order. Options paralyze him. The line behind him grows. Uh oh, SpaghettiOs.

He is hungry and choiceless, stalling like a stood-up date, like the pale moon. The woman behind him clicks her tongue, and the man behind her says, “C’mon, dude.”

In his pallid, slender hands is a ten-dollar bill. But at this moment, containing all time and mystery, he's confident that the bill is in his possession.

Look closely—across Alexander Hamilton’s monied face is, in bright pink ink, a haiku of longing to the green-eyed, hot-blooded woman Kafka will not marry, not in this life. Not ever. The true face of the Amerikan dream.

Grumbling in the queue, dissension in the ranks, turmoil in the crown jewel of supply and demand, Kafka steps aside and wipes off beads of sweat from his forehead, apologizes to the young cashier whose college loans will follow her to the grave and to the primarily decent citizens whose minds have long been made up and to whom he cannot relate.

Then, a cheeseburger is slid across the counter, and in a sudden panic, he seizes it and exits the restaurant. Nobody says a peep, nobody chases him down, and knowing not why he acted like a fool, a thief, a hamburger, a gang of jaunty words comes to him, and he repeats them aloud: “Try ’n stop me now, Daddy. You and whose army?”

He calls his mom on the drive home, the phone between his legs.

“Ma, I have sinned today, for I’ve just stolen a cheeseburger.”

“Saving money just like I taught you,” says Mrs. Francisco, her voice tinny on speakerphone. “I’d urge you to go to Confession, but all the churches are gone. Though the priests still give sermons on our little computer screens. I wonder who pays their salaries?”



Before politely refusing a dinner invitation from his farsighted mother (who will outlast him by a decade), he does quick math to calculate how many months he's been alive compared to one thousand, one million, one billion, say, all the galaxies in the burning blackness, his present number, infinitesimal, jolts him beyond belief. There are only so many pleasures the flesh requires.

At the corner of Commerce and NW 24th Street, he tosses the wrapped, still-warm burger out the window onto the sidewalk across from the Superior Convenient Shop, where it will surely end up in hungrier hands. An act of personal freedom? A force from within that took the reins?

Either way, not a soul in sight—not the figure in a top hat outlined in an apartment window, one among many terrors in the city—will stop him from forming that piece of work existing only inside his mind called the perfect story. And boy, is it beautiful. You've got this, Mr. K.

Like moviegoers, the birds lined up on power lines cheer him on. He blows kisses to them and wants to hug the whole wide world. He will wake up empty tomorrow; no, worse than that. His heart is racing for now, and he cannot get home fast enough. He drives the speed limit, then a hair's breadth faster, fingers typing on the steering wheel.

It's a song you can almost dance to.

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Alex Salinas, a novelist, poet, and short story writer, is a member of the San Antonio literary scene and a poet with *Voces Cosmicas*. His latest novel is forthcoming from Flowersong Press in 2025.

## Mentorship

By Alex Salinas

I met the poet at a Starbucks on the Westside, somewhere I'd describe how I like my coffee: intense and gritty. He was nearly twice my age, maybe more (I'm not good with birthdays), and he told me how things used to be, just the way I liked hearing them. "We are kindred spirits," he posited, to which I fist-bumped my chest in agreement. "When I began writing," he said, "I had nobody to lift me in the ranks. No mentors." They didn't arrive for him until the 1990s when he was middle-aged—still possessing a long, dark mane. I remember thinking, Isn't the point of being a Chicano poet not to have mentors? Or maybe I had it twisted. Regardless, the fact that they eventually arrived indeed signaled the nature of our condition—"they never arrived," amounting to the same thing as "they never arrived till later," in my opinion. Anyhow, he was agreeable and temperate—qualities that convinced me, paradoxically, of the darkness illuminated in his verse. The more excellent they are, the harder they surprise. Here was a scribe, damnit, who risked relationships and career to express himself despite his literary forbears—what was not to love? (I cannot enjoy reading poetry without thinking, on some level, of "love.") We had an entertaining conversation about John Berryman and the concept of gossip, concluding that someone among our tribe ought to publish a book titled *The Chisme Dream Songs*. (Later, but not much later, *The Suicide Dream Songs* came to mind.) After we parted ways, I drove home feeling leaner, like talking had sapped excess cholesterol from my arteries. I marveled at a wispy billow of clouds against an indigo sky—clouds I was sure I'd seen before, perhaps in a cowboy western my mother showed me when I was a kid. Once I got home, I wrote a stanza about those selfsame clouds before quitting abruptly, remembering the joke from an old friend: "Everyone who writes poetry writes

about clouds.” Wherever they were, I’d never see them again. None of my poems would bring them back. Not one. It was almost enough to make a grown man cry.

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Alex Salinas, a novelist, poet, and short story writer, is a member of the San Antonio literary scene and a poet with *Voces Cosmicas*. His latest novel is forthcoming from Flowersong Press in 2025.

## The Game

By Alex Salinas

A mathematician in a black smoking jacket and a philosopher in white jeans dangled their legs off a penthouse rooftop. They were at a party but off to the side. (For this account, they are elevated from tertiary to secondary to primary characters.)

“You played an excellent game back there,” the mathematician complimented, referring to their speed chess match.

“I cannot for the life of me stop lying when I answer the phone and answer *No* to the question: ‘Were you sleeping?’” the philosopher remarked.

“Probably,” the mathematician commented, “you are only hurting yourself.”

“Certainly,” the philosopher countered, “I don’t like being caught unawares.”

“Then explain this,” the mathematician said, grabbing a photo of his wife sleeping with the philosopher inside his jacket.

“We knew you knew,” the philosopher responded without skipping a beat. Then, he retrieved from his front pocket an empty vial that said *Poison*.

“Predictable,” the mathematician said, then pulled out of thin air an empty vial that said *Antidote*.

The men engaged in a three-second stare down—then locked legs.

“Nah ah, they’ll see,” warned the mathematician, gesturing toward the partygoers seated around the pool under the patio lights, basking them in primary colors.

He then pointed at the sky and added, “Just as that speck Mars can see.”

“You first,” ordered the philosopher, and the mathematician, who’d felt a charley horse coming on, wisely relinquished his grip.

“The world is a series of facts, which itself is a fact alone,” the philosopher mused, “and words are facts in the fact of language, which is entirely mutable. So when you say, ‘I give you my word,’ you are truly saying, ‘My lies are already in your bloodstream.’”

“You speak of truth,” the mathematician judged, “the way you screwed my wife, which, according to her, is not very skilled.”

“And that’s,” the philosopher began, “a fact, Jack,” the mathematician finished.

“Did we,” inquired the philosopher, “just become best adversaries?” finished the mathematician.

The men couldn’t help but chuckle. They realized the game was over—the mathematician having seen it coming, the philosopher having seen no rhyme or reason. They had parceled themselves to the world and each other; now, it was high time to wrap up the gig. “Once,” the philosopher said, “my mother sliced a vein shaving her legs, and later that day, I cut myself open, shaving my neck.”

“Probably,” the mathematician said, “that’s inevitable.” “Certainly,” the philosopher agreed, “there are things you can’t outsmart.” He extended his hand toward his finest adversary, and they shook for seconds on the clock—then locked legs. As they plummeted, the mathematician found solace in the fact that he was traversing an indefinite amount of half distances—an incandescent arrow against the darkness with infinite thrust and everlasting potential; the philosopher shifts his pants and shrieked, the latter of which was reported to the police and the media as an undeniable fact, at least to those pitiable revelers planted within earshot.

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Alex Salinas, a novelist, poet, and short story writer, is a member of the San Antonio literary scene and a poet with *Voces Cosmicas*. His latest novel is forthcoming from Flowersong Press in 2025.

## **The Spoken Word is the Message**

By Fernando Esteban Flores

One medium that Gen Z and millennials tend to understand better than most are sound bites generated by TikTok and YouTube. In 1964, Marshall McLuhan published “Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man,” highlighting the iconic, controversial line, “The medium is the message.” The brain can easily access catchy phrases when blended around the ubiquitous sound bite that entered the American social lexicon, shifting from the “visual” to the “acoustical” world. “One of the big flips taking place in our time,” McLuhan told literary critic Frank Kermode in 1974, was “the change over from eye to the ear.”

Enter the New Age of the Spoken Word.

A new collection of poetry is making the rounds around college campuses. Chris “Rooster” Martinez’s “Mexican Dinosaur” (*Write About Now Publishing*) also teaches writing and literature at Palo Alto College. Martinez’s poems are rooted in the “Homeric” oral tradition that auditory performance precedes the theatric dynamics of “spoken word” poetics. And, of course, the “word” is acoustically alive and well, bursting with all its audial and thematic manifestations. Martinez’s poems are direct, aggressive, and confessional yet unconditionally honest and raw. When the need arises, his pitch shifts to high gear, growling verbs and spearheading adjectives in an exhortation of anger, rage, and frustration, all tempered by humor and familial love.

Pause—take a breath.

These poems strike at your guts relentlessly—a veritable trademark of spoken word poetry. Listening to the lyrics, one hears Martinez’s pitch rise to the level of protestation against the everyday injustices suffered by Chicanos who find themselves—even at this hour—questioning



their identities, their worth, their culture—even their place—in a country that has often turned a deaf ear to their cries.

In one poem, “MX][AM,” Martinez expresses frustration: “I’m tired of working//twice as hard//to impress the Mexicans & Americans.” What is the motivation when there is no recognition? In “Gods Like Us,” the Pope visits San Antonio incognito to see for himself how “we use//day to day gods//for the day to day broken things//dead batteries//suspended sentences/*suenos aplastados*” only to find “dioses sin coronas//*como nosotros* (gods with no crowns//like us).

This is where we live. “Bo-de-gas” (bodegas) selling “suspect gasoline.” Disturbing images crop up as in “Jury Duty Blues,” where a “boy stands accused//his mother//sits in the shadow of the accusation//like gum in a napkin.”

At times, rants such as “Barrio Yard Sale” (a poetic collaboration with two other poets) excoriate the unjust property appraisal system skewed to favor capitalist hipsters and the effects of gentrification and displacement of displaced residents. Constantly prodding, questioning, and provoking emerges the title poem “Mexican Dinosaur.”

Who validates worldwide myths while a Meso-American legend regarding the origin of *Quetzalcoatl* is relegated as a cute little story? This raises the question: Is a person of Mexican descent in this nation who values and promotes assimilation doomed to share the same fate as the dinosaur?

Martinez surmises it in the penultimate poem, “Somos Cosmicanos,”

*“la gente de semilla*

*lluvia*

*y sol*

Hand in hand, we

Carry each other beyond the cosmos.”

McLuhan knew full well that “Writing is the content of print. Speech is the content of writing,” to which, I add, *Voice is the message*. Listen to the voice in Chris Martinez’s collection—the message could not sound any clearer.

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Fernando Esteban Flores is the director and founder of *Voces Cosmicas* and a retired Texas educator. He is the author of three volumes of poetry and Poetry Editor of the *Catch the Next Journal of Pedagogy & Creativity* (West Haven, CT).

## *Milagritos*

By Fernando Esteban Flores

When Father Luís discovered that the statue of St. Anthony was missing from the church, he began to worry. The people of the village of San Antonio adored the centuries old icon. It had come through Spain from Portugal some say as early as the 1700's and had been a fixture in the church ever since people could remember. People worldwide invoke and venerate St. Anthony as the patron saint for the recovery of lost items, and credit him with many miracles involving lost money, lost relatives, and even lost spiritual goods. The parishioners considered it a holy symbol—a good luck charm if you will. Even though Father Luís had tried to teach the villagers that statues were only representations of holiness and goodness mere shadows of the divine. Yet, the people had their own ways of looking at things. They believed that the statue was responsible for bringing their tiny village *buena fortuna*—a much needed commodity in this part of the world. The influence of the outside world was creeping ever so close to the tiny village. Imagine a statue assigned “rock star” status.

Father Luís had enough problems to worry about.

When Señora Martinez was bitten by a huge rat while planting corn in the field, she made a special visit to the church and brought some sheaves of corn to lay at the feet of the statue so that she would be healed of the curséd rodent bite. Later that same day, the teeth marks miraculously disappeared. Señora Martinez ran through the village streets yelling to anyone who would hear that she was cured. “*La mordida, la mordida a desaprecido!*” Everyone was amazed at the newly discovered powers of St. Anthony's statue.

Ever since that incident, the simple people of the village started claiming “maravillas/wonder” cures. All sorts of healings popped up inexplicably. Eventually strangers from all over the county started pouring into the village and inevitably sought their fortunes at the doors of the church. People began pinning pictures of their loved ones as well as requests that they were praying for on the statue of the now famous saint.

Women came on their knees crying to the statue seeking help for their husbands, children, and relatives. One lady asked the statue to help her get rid of her alcoholic husband. Another woman asked for a washing machine. People started pleading for all sorts of weird answers to their

problem: winning lottery tickets, television sets, cars, and trucks. When one lady pleaded for a new pair of shoes for her cat, Father Luís realized it was time to act.

Then, as a stroke of genius or perhaps a sign of divine intervention or maybe frustration, the iconoclastic priest had a flash of celestial inspiration—of sorts. It really started out as joke—playing a prank on the relentless parade of outsiders who were by now trampling over Father’s petunias and well-manicured lawn to convince the pesky visitors that the statue had no otherworldly powers and hopefully, *get the hell out* (well Father wanted to say it but then thought the better of it)—kindly go away. After all, even a priest gets tired of straightening out flatten bushes, repairing broken windows, and sweeping up the litter left behind by such insensitive miracle seeking, idol worshipping, saliva drooling gawking infidels.

The day the old drunk, Nacho, stumbled wildly into the church was the day Father Luís set his plan in motion. The old priest hid behind the small altar covered with a white linen cloth which had been knitted by some of the village women and which supported the 6-foot statue of the saint. The drunken Nacho began muttering and mumbling unintelligible sounds at first, “Ahhh...mememe... gah, gah, gah,” as he straighten out his torn weather worn coat as if he were about to meet someone real important.

“Uh, ah, er...dear St. Anthony,” he stuttered. “They say you can work *milagritos* so here I ‘m come to ask you for to give me, ah, the miracle of a big new bottle of you know...ah, “*wineito*.” It gets cold out there and an old *viejo* like me must find ways to keep warm. I only ask this as way to help me stay in good health, so to speak and not merely to get drunk. If you do this for me, I promise that I will come to church for a whole week and maybe even more. So please Dear St. Anthony, my favorite of all saints, since you know what it’s like to be poor and destitute and how it is when you lose everything you had. I lost my house, my goods, my wife...no need to go into all that since I’m sure you see many things from where you stand, hehehe.” The old man knelt and bowed his head as in a solemn gesture of devout and almost convincing prayer.

Father Luís fought to contain himself and had to stifle a huge spasm of laughter when he heard this ridiculous request. He felt like jumping out from behind the display and throwing the old fart out.

“I’ll show him,” he thought as he gathered himself. “How dare he come to the house of God with such a senseless petition!”

So, in the best and deepest voice he could muster, Father Luís said clearing his throat, “Uhuhuh... my son, I have heard your prayer and have decided that it is worthy of some consideration. What you ask is a simple and unselfish thing. If a big one is all you ask out of the impoverished and destitute conditions of your life, I will grant you this once in a lifetime wish. However, you must do a favor for me in return for my help.

By this time, the old wino really thinking that St. Anthony was addressing him at that very moment, threw himself on the floor shaking in fear of his life and reluctant to look up or sideways or any ways for that matter.

“I’ll do whatever you ask, St. Anthony,” he stammered in astonishment bordering on mortal dread. He never in his wildest dreams or drunken condition could have imagined a talking statue much less one talking directly to him, Nacho, the village drunk.

“Very well, said Father Luís, “for 7 days you must hide behind my holy statue and pretend that you are me. But you must be careful that the help you give *be of no help* at all—to anyone. And above everything, you must tell no one. Trust me. That is all I can tell you at this time. The work of the Lord is mysterious, and his ways are not often clear to men. They must be obeyed at all costs. Now go and come back tomorrow at this time and do as I have instructed you to do.”

“I will do as you have said St. Anthony. I will not let you down,” promised the old drunk. That night the smelly old *borracho* visited *El Gato Negro* cantina at the edge of the village. He stood outside the tavern begging for a little pocket change to help him get through the night until he had panhandled enough money for a cheap bottle of *Ojo de Vidrio* wine, worse than a shot of Red Eye. Horribly worthless stinking stuff guaranteed to kill your liver, destroy your kidneys, and cause irreparable damage to your brain or whatever little of it one had left.

But it was better to spend the frosty night with something warm in your belly than to freeze your ass off in some piss drenched, roach infested alley. Or so Nacho piously believed.

The next day past the appointed time, Nacho showed up at the church hung over, still rather drunk. Fumbling about and stumbling around he sneaked into the sanctuary and took his place behind the statue of the saint. And there he waited as St. Anthony instructed him in his sweat soaked, stinking shirt, torn and tattered coat reeking of wine and urine. His head spinning in drunken orbit with flies buzzing around him like a rotten banana.

As he sat waiting for his first victim to enter, he remembered the saint's words, "Make sure that the help you give be *no help* at all." He started repeating the words over and over as if he were praying. "No help, no help!"

At that instant, a beautiful young woman about 25 years old walked up to the statue offering petitions silently at first. Then she began to address the saint with less apprehension as if she might be talking to her best friend.

"Oh sweet St. Anthony, sweetest of all saints, kindest and gentlest. I know that you help people with impossible problems, and that you favor those who have lost something or who are maybe even lost themselves," she pleaded almost to the point of tears. "I need a miracle...ahhh a really big one." Just as she pronounced the last word,

Nacho muttered, "No help! No help, "going over the words not wanting to forget what he had been entrusted with. "No help! No help. "

When she heard those menacing words echo throughout the church, shocked at the saint's foreboding response, she fainted and fell head first into the table housing the statue and down came sweet St. Anthony, kindest and gentlest, halo and all, right on top of Nacho's old lice infested hairy head. The village drunk was out cold.

St. Anthony's fractured head rolled senselessly down the aisle and the rest of his form broke into countless shards of centuries old plaster and wire. It was no t.k.o. Humpty Dumpty might have been salvaged with world class craftsmanship assistance and care, but it would truly take an act of God to put St. Anthony back together again.

When Nacho recovered his shattered senses and sobered up somewhat and saw the damaged icon and the beautiful unconscious girl lying among the shattered fragments, he stumbled over to the storage closet, found a broom and an old potato sack, swept up the remains of St. Anthony and hurriedly slipped away through a side church door not wanting to have to explain how he came to find himself in this situation. No one would believe his story. He could hardly believe it himself. I mean what would he say to the authorities that St. Anthony had commanded him to offer *no help* to those who came looking for it? He was neck deep in holy shit if you pardon the expression.

Not long afterward, the young woman sat up and almost fainted again in disbelief at the sight of the missing saint. She began trying to piece the story together but quickly abandoned the idea. Nothing made sense, nor could it be reasonably explained. What would she tell Father Luis or the authorities who would certainly come to investigate? The saint had spoken and then vanished? Fearing that she had somehow brought down Divine Judgment on her head for what she was about to ask of the saint, she decided it was best to leave well enough alone. Since no one had seen her enter the church, and since no one was present, she high-tailed it out of the church thinking it was far better to keep her own counsel about the entire *affair including her own*.

Little by little people stopped coming to the church. No one ever spoke about it after that although at first, rumors and gossip pervaded the village for weeks. Everyone had their own version of what had happened as people who know nothing usually do. Father Luis tried to preach that God had brought down his divine displeasure on the statue since the villagers had put their trust on the icon rather than on God himself.

“God is a jealous God, and he will not share his glory with anything made by man,” proclaimed the priest as if he were Moses himself coming down Mt. Sinai with the legendary tablets in hand. But in the end, nothing could be ascertained. Curiously, the miracles stopped as fast as they had happened. People lost their faith. Crops failed. Visitors and tourists stopped trampling the flower beds. Faithful parishioners inauspiciously moved to other village churches. Ironically when the church doors closed for the last time, St. Anthony himself was lost to oblivion.

On his way out of the village, Father Luis wondered what had happened to the statue.

Somehow, he felt that something particularly miraculous had happened.

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Fernando Esteban Flores is the director and founder of *Voces Cosmicas* and a retired Texas educator. He is the author of three volumes of poetry and Poetry Editor of the *Catch the Next Journal of Pedagogy & Creativity* (West Haven, CT).

**Creative Works: Poetry**  
**Section Editor: Fernando Esteban Flores**



## Pursued by Poetry

*The elevated level of energy involved and then the occasional deflation of that energy when it becomes clear there are some things that are just not going to work—the beauty of this entire process is that you are one of the ones that won't give up. (Unknown)*

The beauty of the process lies in that fact that after a lifelong engagement in this literary pursuit called poetry, the energy that has sustained me from the beginning has not been mental, physical, or psychological, but rather psychic, closer to a spiritual awareness or presence. Not to dismiss or downplay the others for they have had influence and impact. Without that intuitive or instinctive connection, I would not have been able to persist to this day in this mad affair with the written word.

I don't know how I was delivered into its realm or why I was endowed with its ability. No name exists for this except for what a Cajun female poet told me once; she said I was "touched," and I didn't argue with her. I knew early on that I was being molded and guided into certain spheres. I had no mentors or guides as a young boy. I had many clairvoyant experiences as a child and could induce myself into trance like states by staring at any object in my sphere of vision for prolonged periods of time. I was mesmerized by my earliest playmates: slivers of sunshine, moon glow, shadows, leaves, cicada drones, and lines of ants as they traveled back and forth carrying specks of grain or particles vital to their colony.

Early in childhood, say 4 or 5 years of age, I was stung by a scorpion on more than one occasion while playing inside or outside of our little westside house on Navidad Street. The effects felt fatal. Each occurrence sent me into a frenzy of agonizing pain. My tongue would swell and go numb in my mouth accompanied by delirious fevers and chills. There was no antidote or medication then. Grandmother would apply what she called "parches" compresses of mustard, garlic, and other ingredients of which I have no knowledge. Those early home remedies were nothing more than folk cures that had no real effect. In fact, sometimes they worsened the stings not to mention the horrible stink.

The scorpion is my totem. My "nagual"—spirit-guide to simplify a traditional Aztec or Mayan belief. The fact that the oldest known scorpions lived around 430 million years ago during the Silurian period is a testament to their survival and resilience. To amplify understanding and add historical context, according to Aztec mythology, Malinalxochitl, was the goddess or sorcerer of snakes, scorpions, and insects of the desert, thus, giving the scorpion protected status. In Greek mythology, the scorpion is one of the twelve signs of the constellations in the Zodiac. In the Middle East, it is seen as an embodiment of evil as well as a protective force that counters evil. And in another context, it portrays human sexuality. Other symbolic meanings for the scorpion include control, transition, death/dying, passion, treachery, protection, defensiveness, and solitude. All these significations register with me deeply—echo all my life experiences.

Later, I wrote a sequence of tribute poems to the scorpion—ancient kindred traveler through this grueling world. I was anointed into the tribe. My life ever after would be a series of difficulties, troubles, and ordeals (oneiric but real). Obstacles—the norm. The odds of success are as likely as

extracting silver from smelt iron. Strength drawn from solitude. The scorpion's sting is a throbbing reminder of the pleasure in the struggle—along the alacrán's path of self-discovery.

Each poet in this issue has his/her own tale to tell how they came to poetry or how poetry came to them. Enjoy their words. Each poem is a story all its own. Each reader takes what they need.

I am my brother's keeper—so stings the scorpion christening the flesh with its fiery kiss.

--Fernando Esteban Flores

Poetry Editor

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## La Casa del Alacrán/The House of the Scorpion

By Fernando Esteban Flores

*(for Carlos Castaneda)*

I was confirmed in the house of the scorpion the  
voices of leaves whispered the knowledge of  
destiny & desire among the ruins of the garden &

the stones were the weighted memory of dead souls  
inscribed by bony fingers in the moist clay of innocence

shadows like hanged men dangled over me  
from the beams of a history long past in the  
deep, dank air of forgetfulness

there are many rooms in the house of the scorpion  
entries through the fires of the first sting

where the scorpion crosses the desert of the empty palm  
carrying the cryptic codex of dreams on the jagged claws  
of night

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## My Hair is the Hair of the nation

By Gerardo Arturo Carrasco Gándara

I went up to Denver to compare the eyes of my people  
And the basalt and snow *mimbres*<sup>1</sup>  
With the highest peaks of the Rocky Mountains.

My heart in Albuquerque  
Took the midday shade,  
And from an antelope dream,  
I got up;  
With sharp ends of yucca  
I helped myself make a hole in a ceramic pumpkin bowl:  
It wasn't difficult to get into that opening  
And see the entirety of other worlds.

In many streams of water  
I thought I saw Gerónimo,  
Chief-warrior of the Apache armies.  
A warrior, who's rebellious eyes,  
Could only be tempered by the yellow-red flowers in Alope's hair.

I still see the strands of my hair  
Surrounded by the waters of the Gila River  
Where I took my heart by force of strength  
To bathe naked with a pack of gray wolves,  
Put aside the mezcal bottles  
And dry my sorrows and worries from the past  
On the humpbacked rocks  
Of the Nde<sup>2</sup> nation.

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<sup>1</sup> Particular style of pottery decoration from the Mimbres Culture, in the American Southwest.

<sup>2</sup> Native people of the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts.

## Petal Pleat

By Gerardo Arturo Carrasco Gándara

I have realized the endless pleats  
That a man can have:  
Greened around the edges with life's turpentine,  
Filled in the bowels with vicissitudes of hay,  
With withered ups and downs,  
Living always unconscious, with coffee stains on a shirt,  
Holes in the upper side of his trousers – The result of nervously smoking,  
Always frightened,  
Or by simply being an idiot with a cigarette in the hand.

I guess the same thing can be said  
About women  
And all sexual and gender minorities.  
With the difference between them being  
That women display melasmas on their faces  
(A living proof of the hormonal insurrections they experience)  
And that the LGBTQI+ communities, carry an anchor that holds them  
To a moral output no less tragic  
Then that of a soldier abandoned in an enemy camp.

There is a wandering spirit in the fields  
A spirit that lives with unease, I know this...  
Because it seems to me  
That we are not separated from the world  
From everything that surrounds us;  
That there is a living soul in the fields  
As there is a soul inside of each and every one of us...

That spirit of the grasslands, is jaded  
He picks up a carbon dioxide butt from the grass,  
And reads in the newspaper every morning  
That another 50 meters of trees have been chopped off a flat surface  
To build the new house for the warehouse supervisor  
Who is now the head of a sustainable enterprise  
Drives an EV,  
And sings wonderful Christmas carols  
At his local Church.

Life is strange, uneasy  
And yet we clasp  
To it day in day out, indifferent, grim, broken  
Inconstant and unconscious.

Thus, like folded messages of doom for the world  
We are born, we grow up and we become arrogant;  
We light a cigarette, we burn our pants  
And we sit down for coffee over breakfast  
With the white shirt of a homeless man.

---

**Gerardo Arturo Carrasco Gándara** was born in San Antonio, Texas. He is a member of the Cd. Juarez, Mexico society of writers, a city where he has spent part of his life. Writing poems, plays, and short stories was a pastime during his high school years; some of which managed to get published in school anthologies. In recent years - living now in the Alamo city - his poems have been featured in San Antonio's National Poetry Month (SA Poetry on the move), as well as local magazines and academic journals. He has five unpublished collections, all of which have been accepted, in highly respectable poetry prizes. He has only one self-published collection of poems called: *Pago en especie: Amor* or *Payment in Kind: Love*. A collection of poems published through the Cd. Juarez, Mexico Society of Writers.

## **Desde que llegaste**

By Alicia Zavala Galván

Desde que llegaste  
las galaxias en mi universo  
giran en orden  
Sinfonía de astros celestiales  
obedeciendo nada  
solamente la naturaleza  
de energía que  
tú brindas a mis días

El gozo de vivir  
llega en los instantes inesperados  
despertando admirando el día

Sentirse querida y necesitada  
porque alguien ha puesto tu  
almohada favorita a tu alcance

Aprender a vivir con poco  
para vivir más

nos libera  
para respirar  
con tranquilidad

## Since you arrived

By Alicia Zavala Galván

Since you arrived  
the galaxies in my universe  
rotate in order  
Symphony of celestial bodies  
obeying nothing  
only the nature  
of energy  
that you bring to my days

the joy of living  
arrives in the unexpected instances  
awakening admiring the day

Of feeling loved and needed  
because someone has placed  
your favorite pillow within reach

Learning to live with less  
to live more

liberates us  
to breathe  
with tranquility



## Words gush out of my head

By Alicia Zavala Galván

Everyone is so capable and talented  
writing sonnets  
rhymes that ring  
syllables that match

Egad  
I feel impotent  
My emotions will not fall into these  
neat packages of expressions

Words gush out of my head  
and mouth like an overflowing  
river running out of its banks

No discipline at all  
If I stop to catch a word  
from the air that matches  
My tears will have dried for lack of a syllable  
Or the blush of love will grow cold and colorless  
the flicker of my heart might dampen and stagnate waiting for the disciplined vowel to appear.

I admire those who can work wonders  
without losing the emotion of the words  
I prefer my verse to roam freely until  
they find the perfect niche

---

**Alicia Zavala Galván** has published six collections of poetry, the majority bilingual. She has also done work as an editor, artist, and Jewelry designer. As an independent scholar, her major activity has centered around the Mexican seventeenth-century feminist poet nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, writing, producing, and presenting a play on Sor Juana's last days as well as some of Sor Juana's writing. Her literary and scholastic works in English and Spanish have been presented to popular and academic audiences in the United States, Mexico, and South America. She continues to translate poems by the Argentine poet Alfonsina Storni and the contemporary Cuban poet Carilda Oliver Labra, the Uruguayan Teresa Wilms Montt, as part of her research project about their lives and works.

## Playlist: Bebop, Wobble, Love for Sale

By Jim LaVilla-Havelin

There's a photograph -  
Princeton, Einstein on a bicycle  
and the wheels wobble, eccentric.  
You're probably thinking, what the hell's he talking about,  
middle of the night after *Caravan*.  
I'm talking about bebop, about the off rhythm, an  
extra beat, cool half step into the darkness, same as  
Einstein's wheel, wobbling, a planetary orbit out of  
shape and out of time, bending sound, light and even  
the slow moving, perfect *Caravan*.

You can hear it in Monk – the mind and sound gone  
yet another beat.

You can hear it in Bird soaring free.

And the ripples of it bump onward in our musics yet today.

But Billie's wrecked voice wobbles through  
*Love For Sale*, a song of sex and sloth and tragedy.  
A song from the heart of darkness and the voice  
of experience.  
Come on, put down, longing and loss, *Love For Sale*, as  
broken as Einstein's wheels in a

universe so empty it is full.

Me, I'm thinking of the quiet between the notes, the ways we  
each get through the night, the bump, the wobble and the wail.

It's 3:45 am. This is Richard Isaacson on WKLX on your AM Dial.  
Next up a little Glenn Miller. Back to the perfect  
world of swing, *Autumn Leaves*.

## **Playlist: Call**

By Jim LaVilla-Havelin

call it a call to prayer if you wish not, in my long  
night's journey into jazz

a wake-up call

but Yusef Lateef's Sister Mamie wails and rolls

high enough but melodic, not a squeak, a squawk, or a yelp but might  
just be the call, from the minaret, the call to prayer

while others give us call and response

or ports of call

and in the songbook you'll find - Call Me Irresponsible

this is Lateef with the bass running beneath in a measure like  
breath so everything about it would suggest prayer, a prayerful  
attitude,

might I suggest, you listen in on

Sister Mamie

## **Playlist: Mose**

By Jim LaVilla-Havelin

mose, mose, mose

he

always makes

me smile - voice

doodles through

a reverie, a while

returns to

words wobbling

around meaning and

moves -

mose, mose, mose

lets the language

laugh

across

tongue and timing

hip and groove

and there he goes

## **Playlist: Round About**

By Jim LaVilla-Havelin

when he plays it himself  
Monk scrabbles toward the hour in  
“Round About Midnight” has the whole  
roundabout in it – the extra notes,  
slipped steps, balance of languor and  
deliberateness that is so clumsily  
beautifully night bound

others, after, have latched onto the melody’s thread  
they’ve smoothed it out silkily  
almost turned it into a ballad  
and lost the way we lurch and lumber  
into night

**Playlist: *North (a listener)***

By Jim LaVilla-Havelin

at the edge of the world

his voice comes thin to me

as if it had labored up the Shield to find me and then he plays

MJQ

and in the silvered night of the far north

Milt's vibes are all alive with sound which is shape, which is color

---

**Jim LaVilla-Havelin** is the author of six books of poetry, with two more forthcoming - *The Thoreau Book* (Alabrava Press, 2024) and *Mesquites Teach Us To Bend* (Lamar University Literary Press (2025)). Educator, editor, and Community Arts Activist, LaVilla-Havelin is the Coordinator of National Poetry Month in San Antonio.

## **Island**

By Pablo Anthony Lopez

In the end, you burned all your bridges.  
You became an island with no sunsets.  
Reason couldn't reach you.  
Love become a boat lingering, on the horizon  
of your loneliness.  
You abandoned the ones.  
That didn't make you feel strong.  
You played wicked games with wicked language.  
You kept the bad things for yourself.  
Then tossed the good things away,  
With little to nothing to say.  
The island became your prison,  
A place for you to reflect  
Staring out into sea.  
Embraced in terror.

## What Should A Poet Look Like

By Pablo Anthony Lopez

Should I wear a Zorro hat with a large feather?  
Black beret with a turtleneck sweater.  
Should I have a wise raven whispering in my ear?  
Telling me philosophies I don't want to hear.  
Should I look like I crawled out of a Kerouac book?  
Hair slicked back with the Fonzie look  
Should I cry about my family curse?  
Or about my broken heart or something worse.  
Can I paint on a Dali stash?  
Bongo drums are beating as the lighting flashes.  
I'll even dawn on a black cape.  
With a crazy-eyed look as I make my escape.  
So what should a poet look like? Let me see.  
It's not what a poet looks like. It's what a poet can be.  
Should I build me a throne made from words?  
Announce myself, King of metaphors and verbs.  
Should I continue to chase the stars at night?  
While dreaming about my San Antonio life.  
So should I take time to teach a child how to write a poem?  
Who doesn't even know where their life is going?  
I will spread the love of verse all around.  
While mimicking Mother Nature's sounds.  
I'll light the fire of prose in every city, country, and town.  
Even where the wicked bomb everything to the ground,  
I'll make a difference in the hearts of many.  
Stay humble as Buddha, crisis-ready.  
I'll carry a heart as light as dandelion seed.  
Enough to fight off man's tyranny and greed.

---

**Pablo Anthony Lopez** is a San Antonio born poet/artist who started his career working in for Hearst Media Corporation. He started writing poetry in high school, mostly for his own enjoyment. His poetry has been published in "The Poet Magazine" and in "Lone Star's Poetry Magazine". Currently he is working on his first chapbook of poems.



## Quietly

By Carlos Loera

Death

Approaches like a black painting

Smiling at me

Like Yesterday

Looking at me

Surprising me

Like a dark sunrise

Like the moon that rises

In the early morning light

Death approaches

Quietly

As the drums echo

In the twilight sun

Death approaches

Like a summer song

## **My cup of memories**

By Carlos Loera

My cup of memories  
That I held  
On the morning  
That you left  
The sun gave way  
To that dark dreary rain  
I was waiting for you  
Waiting for something  
I did not understand  
But something  
Told me to keep thinking  
Why  
The colors  
In the sky  
Seem so dark  
When the silence seems to  
Scream at me  
When all I want to do  
Is sleep that long day sweat  
Off my dreams  
All I want to do  
Is wake up and see you  
One more time  
And share one more cup of memories  
With you.

## Waiting for you

By Carlos Loera

In the shadow  
I'll wait for you  
with my hands up  
welcoming you  
I wait for you  
Today  
I came here  
With hope  
Come  
Here I am  
With my dreams  
I want to feel you on my face  
Bathe me  
I'll wait for you  
In the dark  
I wait for the magic  
of your light  
I hope the  
Moon releases you.

---

**Carlos Loera** graduated from the University of Wisconsin at Madison with an MFA in Art. He teaches at San Antonio College and works at Bazan Library. He paints, draws, writes poetry, and produces *Voces Cósmicas*, a group of established & emerging poets.

## Travel Essentials

By C.L. "Rooster" Martinez

Bring road trip chicharrones

A tender bark of flesh goes by many names

*Cracklins* in southern states

*Pork Rinds* in others

You won't find the Tapatio kissed kind

So bring a bottle from home for the miles ahead

When the drawls grow coastline long

And the San Antonio of your speech

Sings different

Sing different

Lost in the wild rest of the country

Outside your brown bubble

A blue ox may make good barbacoa

Make due

When the Tapatio runs out

Don't take it as a sign to run back

To the familiar

When the locals ask you to try something

It means they want you to stay

Or so you can say something nice about Alabama

Florida

Arkansas

Tennessee 54

When you encounter a wall

Paint a wild bluebonnet on its skin

A flower must grow where the idea of freedom

Fears its own naked self

Fears being a tender bark of flesh

## Camote

By C.L. "Rooster" Martinez

Duende Earth fashions armor tougher  
Than sun-kissed ruby tomatoes know

Peel a sweet potato  
And the skin does not give itself up  
Easy

The world is not made of silk mangoes

A root is born  
aware it may live all its days  
In darkness

And its one chance to see in the sun  
Is the day it loses hide to hungry blades

Yet still fights back

Hacked from cracked soil  
A dirty angel of no lord  
And by crooked divinity  
A saint for broken spirits  
Cursing in quiet the battles  
That will be won  
One day                      they must  
Above ground or below              in this life or the next

## Will the birds recall our ballads?

By C.L. "Rooster" Martinez

I drink elderberry with agave for sweetness like I assume the bankers and real estate prospectors  
with big fish eyes and cat stomachs do like them I know where to find the statistics and how to read  
them

how to interpret the tea leaves' violent dance for the future of these neighborhoods

I know the median income of the zip code I inhabit  
I know my two masters' degrees can afford and survive  
the rise of property tax and urban renewal  
I know what urban renewal means and what it really means

but what of the woman two houses down-

when a new park goes up I'm not sure if it is for the residence now a                      or the ones to come  
community's joy robbed at dollar point

once, they changed Old Highway 90 to Enrique Barrera Parkway they  
figured the Mexicans will be happy because it sounds Mexican

but the Mexicans were not happy  
the stores that lined Old 90 couldn't afford  
to change stationary and bank forms to fit new narratives  
the change still happened but the seething remained

when the sun shines hotter many here cannot afford the option to replace themselves  
or run the AC all day

do I belong here when I can keep my AC on all summer?

I learned the card catalog and then the internet my uncle has a scam  
GED and a new email account every tax season

when I walk my neighborhood, I think:  
what is the word  
when you don't miss something you never had  
but probably needed?

does it scare the new residents that we sit outside so much? I  
don't know but it happens

like the rusty, retooled, rundown vans cruising, playing analog Mozart  
and selling helados, Big Red, and pickles with Tajin happens.

but if the air smells of lilac and Starbucks one morning  
and not of searing meats  
beer and onions,  
will the birds war for our return?

six-years after, Old Highway 90's name returned maybe  
things will stay the same if we remain abrasive, never  
celebrate,  
never ask for better than what we already have in this zip code-  
same zip code as my father and his father as my mother, my  
grandmother.



## **By their own god, they are monsters**

By C.L. "Rooster" Martinez

They will debate pronoun usage to death

While giving bullets free speech and a hall pass

Send tanks and rifles to the southern border

Buoy barbwire to catch immigrant children like fish

In Tejas

A translated Caddo word for *ally*

I swear to my god in its infiniteness,

Our state is too small

To be so cruel

The stars aren't so bright around here anymore, y'all

## Loconuts II

By C.L. "Rooster" Martinez

*For some reason, 46% of Latinos support DT*

If a Latino calls you a coconut,  
It means you are brown on the outside/white on the inside

A *Loconut* is a pejorative  
(I made up) that means  
You're brown on the outside/DT on the inside

Loconuts crossed the border or  
Bloomed on a side that was deemed crossed  
Thought it was the finish line  
Didn't realize o no importa  
Your race never stops running

Didn't realize no one checked Columbus for his papers  
Didn't realize there was a time before papers  
You have papers until you don't  
Until the ink flies away o becomes illegal  
Didn't realize a wall can be built  
Anywhere in any heart  
And you can always be on the wrong side of it  
Didn't realize your papers equal a home  
No papers no home no person  
Didn't realize someone could be standing right there  
Breathing

A sword at their neck

Demanding their papers

Official yesterday/unofficial today

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**C.L. "Rooster" Martinez** is a spoken word poet, professor, and occasional podcaster from San Antonio, TX. He has authored three books—*A Saint for Lost Things*, *As it is in Heaven*, and *Mexican Dinosaur* (winner of the 2024 NACCS Tejas Foco book award for poetry). His work has appeared in such publications as *Huizache*, *Voices de la Luna*, *Button Poetry*, *The Huffington Post Latino Voices*, *Acentos Review*, and others. Roost is Executive Director of Write Art Out Inc, a literary nonprofit in SA and a former grand slam champion. Find more about him at his *Instagram*: *roostmtz*.

## **Good Friday**

By Marco Ruiz

The story is reenacted,  
We meditate on the Stations of the Cross,  
Do we crucify Jesus anew or die with him?  
I am not now the tree that you desire me to be,  
I refuse your will, even knowing that my life is a storm  
My leaves feel your essence, Lord, keeping your presence alive.  
My heart rejoices in the ceremony of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross  
Which is the center of my universe  
I long to die with you, and I hope to be raised with you,  
Even though my flesh is of this world, my spirit is yours.  
I implore your father that my knees may always bend  
When I adore the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

## **On the Other Side of the Window**

By Marco Ruiz

I see myself, luminous eyes

Faith and eternity suspended in the glass

Someone is watching from outside.

Footsteps resound

Heavy with the weight of the body

Someone is reflecting

On the other side of the window

Someone is watching.

Silent with mind in a machine that produces ideas

A divan, a half-empty wine glass

Ink on the floor,

The Divine Spirit present.

Someone is reflecting

On the other side of the window

Someone is watching.

## Life Dances on my Feet

By Marco Ruiz

Life dances on my feet

Moving in several directions,

I try to find myself,

I've already been found

I didn't realize it?

This beautiful dance,

Makes sense of everything,

Without rushing into anything

I enjoy the road towards a new journey.

Without bitterness and sorrows

I just dance, and live

Life on my feet.

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**Marco Ruiz** is a journalist, teacher, writer, and a lover of contributing to social development. Graduated in Philology and Communication from UNAN-Managua, Nicaragua. Marco has worked in national and international non-profit organizations promoting human development and has lived in Nicaragua and the United States. He has strong Christian beliefs; for him, God is the center of all things.

## **Flash Focus: Foster Youth in College**

## **New Article Type: Flash Focus**

By Erin Doran

After the summer motivational conference, Dr. Chavez shared with me that several Ascender students mentioned they were former foster youth. Knowing that this is a population I know very little about, I started thinking about what other identities our students hold that often go unrecognized or invalidated. We often think about students' gender, race, first-generation status, and socioeconomic status, but they are far more than these four identity categories.

With this in mind, I wanted to start a quick column in the journal that could highlight a population or identity that draws less attention. Inspired by Dr. Chavez's interactions with students over the summer, I decided to begin with former foster youth. As the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services [DFPS] (n.d.) describes, "When children can't live safely at home, CPS tries to find relatives and family friends who can provide stability while the children can't live with their parents. If no one can be found, the court can give temporary legal custody to CPS, who then places the children in foster care." It is meant to be temporary until more stable living arrangements can be made, and children's living arrangements can vary from being placed with a family to a group care facility.

The state of Texas has several programs to help students who have experience with the foster care system to help them pursue their education. There are various eligibility requirements, including applying for this assistance before their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. It is also noteworthy that a number of colleges and universities in Texas, including Alamo Colleges and Austin Community College, are recognized on the [DFPS website](#) as having specific resources for foster care youth. Austin Community College, in particular, lists foster youth on the website of the [Student](#)



[Advocacy Center](#) and has done special events like a [foster care luggage drive](#) for youth who are about to age out of the system.

I have provided a quick infographic along with some additional resources on the next two pages. If you're reading this and wondering what you can do to support these students:

- Know what services and support your campus offers to these students: The application for state assistance for education looks daunting. Find out where you can refer students to for help. 66
- Make the information about basic needs on campus readily available to students! Further, let's destigmatize students' use of such services. Even with financial assistance, many of our students, including foster youth, may experience hardships like food insecurity as they pursue their education.

Department of Family and Protective Services. (n.d.). "Foster care." Austin, Texas.

[https://www.dfps.texas.gov/Child\\_Protection/Foster\\_Care/default.asp](https://www.dfps.texas.gov/Child_Protection/Foster_Care/default.asp)

# SERVING FOSTER YOUTH

This new series in the *Journal* calls attention to some student populations our colleges serve that may get less attention.

## OVERVIEW

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, there were over 21,000 children in the foster care system in Texas in 2022.



## SERVICES

Various state services are available to help foster youth transition out of the system, including the Texas Foster Youth Justice Project and programs through the Texas Workforce Commission.



## EDUCATION

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board also offers information on the tuition exemption program that can help foster youth pay for college.



## RESEARCH

The research suggests that foster youth are incredibly resilient, yet they may struggle with issues like food and housing insecurity.



## List of Resources for Supporting Foster Youth

Texas Workforce Commission: [Foster Youth Programs](#)

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board: [Foster Care](#)

Texas Children's Commission: [The Road to College: Texas Foster Youth and Postsecondary Education](#)

[Texas Foster Youth Justice Program](#)

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services: [Rights of Children and Youth in Foster Care](#)

**If you'd like to know more about these students, here are some resources:**

Avant, D. W., Miller-Ott, A. E., & Houston, D. M. (2021). "I needed to aim higher:" Former foster youths' pathways to college success. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 30, 1043-1058.

Havlicek, J. (2023). "Don't give up": Persevering for a better life through community college among students with foster care experience. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 155.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.107219>

Johnson, R. M. (2021). The state of research on undergraduate youth formerly in foster care: A systematic review of the literature. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 14(1), 147-160.

Salazar, A. M., & Schelbe, L. (2021). Factors associated with post-college success for foster care alumni college graduates. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 126.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2021.106031>

Toms, O.M., Collins, J.C., & Campbell-Whatley, G.D. (2022). A tenacious population: Supporting former foster youth in higher ed. *Journal of Multicultural Education*, 17(1), 106-122.

UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools

[Foster Youth Studies](#)

[Foster\(ing\) Youth in the California State University](#)

Report: [Basic Needs Insecurity in Texas Community Colleges](#)

Report: [Mission Critical: The Role of Community Colleges in Meeting Students' Basic Needs](#)

## Call for Submissions

Catch the Next's *Journal of Ideas and Creativity* is an interdisciplinary scholarly journal currently seeking articles regarding best practices in higher education as well as creative work representing engagement with ideas that color and/or impact the landscape of higher education in the 21st century. The editors invite submissions of scholarly, pedagogical, and theoretical manuscripts that promote the journal's mission to give voice to faculty, researchers, and administrators who cross disciplines yet maintain a core pedagogical focus on the underserved in higher education. We seek previously unpublished work with a special focus on program data, best pedagogical practices, best teaching moments, and/or ongoing dialogue related to issues in education of national significance. In addition, we invite submissions of book reviews, interviews, poetry, short fiction, and visual art.

Full Author Guidelines, including word limits and formatting guidelines, can be found at <https://www.catchthenext.org/publications/submissions-guidelines>. We accept submissions on a rolling basis and are happy to provide mentoring to any first-time authors.

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# EMPOWERING FACULTY AND STUDENTS

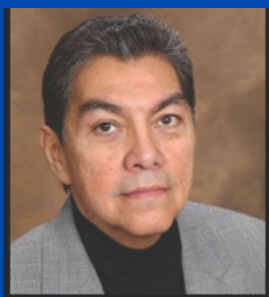
PEDAGOGY, MENTORING, KNOWLEDGE

***CTN celebrates ten years of consultancy experience in this area of pedagogy and we strive to achieve the following: develop empower, enable, and maintain.***



Dr. Maria Martha Chavez is Chief Executive Officer for Catch the Next, Inc. Dr. Chavez Brumell is a sociologist with a history of researching, implementing, and evaluating social policy.

## Editors



Dr. Rafael Castillo serves as Director of Publications and Special Projects for Catch the Next, Inc. and the Ascender program. Currently, Rafael Castillo is a tenured professor of English at Palo Alto College in San Antonio, Texas and has taught CTN Integrated Reading and Writing and English Composition for two years. His “Chicano Literature” bibliographic essay was recently published by Oxford University Press.



Dr. Erin Doran is Catch the Next’s Director of Research and Evaluation.



Mr. Fernando Esteban Flores is a native son of Tejas, a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, published three books of poetry: Ragged Borders, Red Accordion Blues, BloodSongs available through Hijo del Sol Publishing, published in multiple journals, reviews, newspapers, and online sites, selected in 2018-19 by the Department of Arts & Culture of the City of San Antonio, with support from Gemini Ink for his poem Song for America V (Yo Soy San Antonio) as one of 30 poems/poets to commemorate the City’s Tricentennial anniversary. Fernando received an ELLA award and an Arts & Letters award from the San Antonio Public Library System and Friends of the San Antonio Library for his outstanding contributions to the artistic and literary community of San Antonio. He was named poetry editor of the Catch the Next Journal of Pedagogy & Creativity, and is also the founder of an eclectic group of poets, Voces Cósmicas, who promote literacy, poetry, and art.



Catch the Next, Inc.

