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Chupa Chuparosas y Chupacabras

BY

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for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN
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at

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2020

I dedicate this retablo to my mom and my dad



1.

***Pigeon Feathers, Moonlight Sonata, My
Left Foot, The Matrix Revolution...
Dubbed in Spanish***



i.



I am a rascuache nahual

Rascuache is
using a tin jalapeno can as a pot for aloe

Rascuache is
shards of Coca-Cola bottles lining the cement walls of our house

a rear-end window wrapped in duct tape
 a pirated action flick unreleased on DVD being sold en el Mercado Juarez

Rascuache is
 2 instead of 3

Quasi
 a pseudonym
 the lack there of

A rooster that eats feed off a gallon size milk container cut in half
 Better than Bill Gates at his best

Un nahual es
 Eso que cambia, de ser
 A animal

cowhide anastomosed with my Nike socks
 constant becoming
 Martin Margiela tabby boots
 Snake Skin
 split tongue
 ostrich boots painted blue
 split horn
 leather belts
 mi abuela plucking the feathers by hand off a beheaded chicken

ii.



animal
 processed
 horns cut
 repetitive gestures
 crammed
 zoonotic
 overused
 jammed
 crammed
 cages
 systemic brown labor
 stagnant

Tools of labor become items to meditate with
 Extension of hand
 What do you think of when all you do is sweep and clean dust all day?

Future thinkers
 Futile thinkers
 Future thinkers
 Future thinkers

Animal
 Nahual
 Enima
 Anima

Skin stretching back before Anthropocene
 Skin stretching because of it
 And after

iii.

If a body changes because of assimilation or becomes aberrant in its proximity to toxic waste. It no longer craves being whole but rather it desires to be grounded in what it now represents.

In this transformation a body becomes hypersensitive by the growth of tumors that eventually become tentacles like those of our far animal ancestors.

Tentacles with stingers to better defend ourselves. Adapting to new environments and free from binary inscription.



We become Chupacabra
 Fangs become visible
 the click click click of talons on tiled floor
 We protect ourselves
 Skin stretches from native to foreign land
 and to those that come after us
 We heal and give life
 regenerate

Ocotillo, (*Fouquieria splendens*)
 Breaths fumes of landfill waste
 A skin endemic to resistance
 I create a skin barrier
 From what's tired and bruised
 Swollen and putrid
 Neutralizing poison
 Cells reprogrammed
 Restructuring to regenerate
 New chemical composition
 What was a long shrub with spiny stems
 Now a bulbous caudex forms above its roots
 Renamed as
Monstera Spinosa Cephalopentandra
 The moth that drinks the tears of sleeping birds
 Now pollinates it

iv.



I am
 Flesh cut with obsidian daggers
 Eyes pummeled with mortar and pestle made of jade
 pulpa de savila, cempasuchil, copal, tamarindo, Perfume De Gardenias
 plumas de Chuparosa que cayeron del Templo Mayor
 blessed and terrible
 I give to the moon

I am rascuache nahual that rides a used broom to the moon rising between a
 battalion of stars. Guided by the transitory migration of Mexican farm
 workers and day laborers that speckle the terrain with lilac trees. Hovering
 on top of the Chihuahuan desert and the fresh breeze of the night sky.
 Cosmic dust and pollen left behind by the wings of bees drunk with nectar.
 Following old turquoise trading routes replaced by the commerce of NAFTA
 and the sweat smell of Sacred Dutura, that only blooms at night and wilts
 with the heat of the sun.

Up in the sky, I pray to the horns of the crescent moon onto which La
 Virgen de Guadalupe stands in. Upside down they become the fangs of
 Coatlicue, she devours Guadalupe, tastes her blood, eclipses her. All beauty
 all horror, she breaks the marble floor from inside the church of San Judas
 Tadeo, emerges from under the pulpit. Eats the head of the priest, takes his
 heart and uses it as a necklace.

She sits on the moon curved downward

I pray to the moonlight by the river, revealed in crystalline luster. Light in
 gentle swirls that vector as the Rio Grande River pushes its mass towards
 Texas. Light shines on a translucent fishing wire stuck on the tall grass that
 lines the riverbank. Fishing wire tangling itself as it furls and unfurls in the
 current.

Moonlight reveals the crystalline white web of a spider coming down gravities path. Overshadowed only by the lampposts whose light stretches along the black river, refracted by the skipping and breaking of the wind on top of the outer membrane of the river water. The wind breaking and refracting the river into tiny waves that look like the ceiling of Alhambra or the inside of a womb through a sonogram.







2

Lost in Transubstanciacion

-Une filme de Maria Coca-pola

i.

I am a nahual of my family
 they my phantom limbs
 muscle memory
 de mis tios
 de mis abuelas
 ellos me dan
 I am soaked in their blood
 they form a circle around me
 skills and old knowledge move to and from the circle
 I pick and choose
 they teach
 in this circle we move like the wind in January.
 Febrero loco, Marzo otro poco.

ii.

I wear the palms of my **father**
 They grip tight and lead the way
 Me and Him
 Him and Me
 we only talk about my finances.
 that's our communication
 when he says "ya pagaste el teléfono?"
 edged between the space of el and teléfono is
 "How are you, you good?"
 but what I think is wedged in the space between the el and teléfono is
 "You are an irresponsible pendejo"

my father shapeshifts from that side of the U.S.
 he was taught to weld by my grandpa Hilario
 who was called maestro
 he became better than my grandpa Hilario
 when they came looking for el maestro
 they came looking for me father instead
 out of spite and jealousy, my grandpa sent his son the US
 even though he was trying to earn a degree in engineering

My father is the greatest shapeshifter I have ever known
 Growing up he was a cook in the morning
 then shift to being a mechanic at night
 fixing low-riders

He lies on cardboard smeared with oil
 He lays cardboard in the back of a large garbage can
 For us to sleep in
 In an alley when we first slept in the US
 Now he uses my yoga mat to change the oil off my truck

works the night shift at a factory
 that makes cardboard
 body tired
 body wanting to rest
 working a night shift even though everything inside him doesn't

iii.

My uncle **Arturo**
 He makes gray and maroon cement bricks.
 Piles bricks in a step fret motif so that they don't collapse
 Hells me he is making "Mitla, the place of rest in the city of Oaxaca"
 Because of him
 I can see the turquoise double-headed serpent
 In undulating metal bike racks

iv.

My uncle **Jesus**.

Who owns a bulka, a tire repair shop.

He drowns the punctured tire tubes in black dirty water looking for air bubbles, then marks the puncture with a chalk and holds the puncture with his right thumb. When the tube dries, and he needs to know where the exactly the hole is, He licks his finger and then taps and let go, taps and let's go, taps and let's go. Little bubbles accumulate like frogs mating out of the froth of his saliva and the air coming from inside the tire tube.

I do the same with the things inside of me.

Curled in a wad of; hair, bones, nails, and a dried-up placenta

Latched on to the skin of a Chupacabra

I try to drown it at the bottom of the river

It clings to my hands with its sharp nails penetrating my skin

When the air bubbles stop coming, I let the river take it.

Its deadweight rises to the surface; a clump of hair, dried up leaves, and bone going in circles and circles following the current

I lick the scratches of my arms

My T-shirt sprinkled in water of the deed done



v.

Mi Abuelita **Maria**

I grip tight to her memory

An invisible membrane ties me to her

A devotee to the virgin, she gave her pearl necklace to the statue of La Virgen at the church of San Buenaventura in Villa Lopez, Chihuahua.

After fifty years, no one has stolen it, yet

She takes me to church where prayers of my; grandma, father, and mother, and all the old ladies wearing expired cologne with big jewels in place of their youth mix like lemon juice onto water to make lemonade. I'd imagine that my prayer would confuse god with all the; hums, hymns, adorations, supplications, indications, proclamations that it must of made god busy with a headache that I choose to leave my already feeble prayer to myself. The

“plissss stop making like boys” was saved for Wednesday when my stomach churned for Marco, that gay brown character from Degrassi. I made my petition after mi padre nuestro and angel de mi guarda. I prayed so hard and closed my eyes and fists with shame that eventually tears came down my face. Curled in the fetal position, the tear of my right eye came down to meet the tears of my left eye like a candle of penitence wishing for something that would never be undone.

Every week Mi abuelita Maria has las comadres over to say the rosary. I like how las vecinas come in droves. Filling all the seats in the sofa. Chairs are brought from the dining table. Some ladies with old black orthopedic shoes and orange checkered skirts tell my grandma her plants are lovely, “mira esta” says one of them. “Que bonita le salió la bugambilia este año” le dicen a mi abuelita. They offer each other cuttings while they wait for anyone who is late.

The next day, during breakfast la señora Cecilia brings to mi abuelita a tiny cutting of geranium with red blooms barely opening. The bucket is too big for the tiny geranium. The bucket is orange and from Home Depot. I figured that one of her sons from the other side/my side put something inside the bucket with things to bring back to Mexico. Her son Jose must've found it easier leaving the bucket behind. In return my grandma cuts an offshoot of a succulent with red spots and leafs that bend like the jaws of baby crocodiles. Not a good barter, but my grandma does it in good faith.

** Years later on the US side, me my mom and dad would be invited to birthday parties. Bored and with no desire to make friends, I would ease out of the crowd and talk to the plants of the people hosting parties in their trailers. Id look for plants I could take a cutting from. Slowly pretending to be playing around with a Happy Meal toy, but with my eyes bent for the best spot to make a cutting. Slowly, in intervals of here and there. My nail slowing breaking into the steam, a small nip after playing in the jumping-balloon, another after hitting the piñata, and the last nip at night, right after opening gifts. Breaking off a small conceivable limb with my nails, not daring to ask for a knife knowing of its reprieve. Then I would ask my dad for the keys to our burgundy van, dump the Dr Pepper from the Styrofoam cup, fill it with water and finally place; baby aloes, shoots of philodendron, large stemmed coleus, Julieta, Romeo, y menta under the seats of my dad's van. **

There are now rosy peaches on the peach tree that lives in front of the house of mi abuelita Maria, who lives in front of the secundaria. During lunch and once the school kids get out at 2:15, my grandma Maria sits in a chair guarding her tree, sometimes she stops a kid to tell them to say “tu, yes you, de quién eres hija.”

Then and there she remembers old allegiances with old families who slept on cowhide before there was ever a bed. Some kids ask for peaches, she gives them some. But others, and neighbors that should know better come unannounced like the nasty birds that sit perched atop of the peach tree to drill their beaks on the fruit to take before crepusculum. They sleep at night, when the moon is a crescent of itself and a billion visible stars as their witness that comes with a small town like that in the middle of the desert.

Nights like that

Lilac trees release fumes of nectar that were heated all day by the sun
Their fumes rise up into the night sky like invisible dust during a sandstorm



vi.

I wear my grandmother **Rafaela's** dentures.
Clip tight.
Don't let go.
Grind and grind like molcajete.
Chile piquin.
The meat of carne asada.
Pulverize.

Mi abuelita Rafaela
Early morning she sweeps dust of the speckled cement
Over and over
Until the sound is a deep and endless ocean

To reach her, I follow the blue string from El Paso to Villa Lopez. I follow the blue string all the way from Calle Allende, until the string makes a sharp turn, on Calle Madero. I follow it and scare away two red chickens pecking at it until I see it going up to my Abuela Rafaela's house.

She was using the string to mend the holes of my cousin Ignacio's white shirt who was ravaged by the neighbor's Labrador the day before, she brought the blue string to her mouth and yanked it with one snip of her fierce teeth. Later, I followed the string that gently passed through her bugambilia, broke the leaf of a geranium, crossed to where north and south meet, tangled itself in the chair of the dining room, then went up a cabinet to where the half-empty bottle of vinegar sat, quiet but acrid in its patience to be used. Under the bed; the string gathered cat hairs, old skin of days where all she did was toss and turn and of days where she massaged our bellies to help with stomach aches.

Healer. Curandera. Sobadera. Great empanada maker.

A sobadera, who uses her hands with lotion to massage our aching bellies. She moves her hands east to west, the skin and bones of her fingers firmly pressed on our stomach so that she can move our bowels, Not only waste but energy, el mal aire stuck and accumulating inside the belly.

She rubs my stomach when I have aches
 Gives me yerba buena from her garden.
 I like the way her big hands yank the mint so hard that even roots are pulled from moist desert soil.

Once a bull chased me down
 I got too close to where it was tied in the back of the corral
 too entranced by its horns
 the hooves holding tight its massive body
 the sheen of black hair
 the long tail braiding itself
 it chased me down, and I screamed
 Mi abuelo **Gabriel** grabbed me by the shoulders before the bull could trample my body.

After that incident, I had susto. For two nights I couldn't sleep, with the memory of the bull still present in my head. My grandma rubbed an egg on my head. Then she grabbed a rock called piedra lumbre. Translucent, acidic and salty rock that breaks easy. She prayed all night for me. Using the rock and the egg. Padrenuestros, Ave Marias, ten rosaries and focus precision to get the susto out.

The next day, I felt better

I had a good night sleep. My abuela Rafaela told my father to light a fire outside with mesquite branches. She told him to bury the egg and to throw piedra lumbre into the embers of the fire. Then to slowly pick up the rock, and to watch for the any smears of the blackened ash left on the rock. My father did as my abuela Rafaela requested. He turned the piedra lumbre over and over, until he noticed the shape of the bull smeared on the clear rock.



vii.

Once, her hijo **Joel** was driving back from a dance in Santa Maria. Los Reileros Del Norte played corridos all night. He's still elated with the music and drinking thoughts of all that dancing. He could set the road a blaze. He has the sunroof down. But right in front of the road, he sees a giant lechuza, at least five feet tall; the owl starts sprinting, darting towards him with huge eyes set on him.

Right before my uncle Joel steps on the break, the lechuza flies out of the way. Then suddenly its back and flies low in front of him. My uncle thinks the lechuza is going to crash into his front window, but the owl tilts its wings up just enough so that it soars up to where his roof window is, open. My uncle closes the skylight of his car and drives even faster. He tells us this in the morning while eating eggs sunny side up.

“Before the narcos came, we only feared brujas” my grandma says, “this town and the towns around here are infested with brujas,” She tells my uncle Joel, the youngest of her sons. This is the first time he’s seeing a nagual. The animal spirit of brujas.

Mi tio **Raul** says that “once he was with his novia out in the middle of nowhere, the trees started glowing red,” they followed the red glow and saw las brujas dancing by a fire.

He says “they saw one of them spit fire from her mouth expand the fireball with her breath to the point she could climb on it, and rolled the flames, leaving a trail of the embers of mesquite trees behind.

“Maybe it was the nagual of the one we caught, te acuerdas,” says my uncle Gabriel to mi tio Arturo holding a piece of sliced pork on his fork.

“No mames” says mi tio Arturo remembering what happened.

“Estábamos en la labor, doing the night shift on the pecan trees. Making sure no one would come at night to steal. A lechuza came and chased us around, it screeched as it kept trying to claw us with its talons” my uncle says.

“It was huge like how you described yours says my uncle to mi tio Joel” But **Gaby** and me threw a tarp at it. And trapped her in the outhouse.

All night she didn’t make a sound.

It was only when we got close that we could hear it breathing.

The next day, we knew it had turned back to a human. When we unlocked the door, she told us that if we ever told anyone who she was, that she would curse our family.

viii.

None of my relatives seated at that table that morning asked whom the nagual had turned to. Mis tios finished their eggs quietly and left the table going about their day. Perhaps it was out of respect; perhaps because my abuelo Gabriel lay in bed with prostate cancer, perhaps because the cancer kept him from walking, it made his right leg inflamed. Perhaps because now at the end, his skull was starting to crease and concave all over his mouth and cheekbones. More of his bones started showing up in places where the body bends. More hands needed to clean and feed his feeble body. I hardly ever knew mi abuelito Gabriel. Hardly ever knew him before he was bedridden. He was a man that always was assigning chores to all his grandkids. I stayed away from him, because I only wanted to play. He was brusco and intimidating. But my mom told me once that when she had doubts about whether to choose my father or someone else my, grandma Rafaela told my mom, that “my dad wasn't good looking, but that he was hard working like her father, and that he would give her a good life.” That night walking to get a banana for my pregnant mother, I watched my back, filled with things that were unknown to me. Things lay open. Soon, a casket would too.

Two days passed after all the pecans were picked when my grandfather died. The shadow of his sweaty cowboy hat was cast on mi abuelita Rafaela. The brim under a sweaty hat: acres of pecan farms, the property, the towing truck business and the loss of her husband.

“Se murio tu abuelito” my grandma says to me.

But I already knew this, and I think she's just telling that to herself, waiting for someone to tell her it's not true.

It was her three daughters that had to take off the heaviness of an old hat like that. They had to do it while still here, before they go back to the el otro lado. My aunts, two plus my mom. They whisper things I'm not allowed to hear.

First my two aunts and my mother cleaned my grandfather's closet.

Then they packed all his clothes and gave them all over town to those that needed it.

On Sunday a week after his funeral, I saw a man wearing my grandfather's brown leather belt. Two new holes were made to accommodate the new user.

On Monday

The homeless man that sweeps our house for food was wearing his thick brown tweed jacket. It's July and he won't wait for September to put it on. In fact, he'll never again take it off.

He also wears my grandfather's loafers

They are too tight for him.

But he wanted them anyways

He dips his foot in a bucket of water, so that the leather comes malleable to his feet. He does this every day, even though the brown shoes are now bespoke to his feet.

I can hear him outside.

Sweeping.

His squishy feet.

The mud that gets soaked by their wetness.

Wet leather that will eventually smell of potting soil.

**Years later I come back to attend the graduation of my cousin Ruth, the summer between the 8th and 9th grade. I notice my grandpa's blazer on a boy too skinny to wear such a big blazer. This blazer will not see the light of day for two more years, until her second oldest graduates from the 6th grade. **



3.

Tan Tan

I am detritus of the southwest
A dust storm that picks up sombreros
Old condom wrappers
A washed out Hot Cheeto wrapper
Pigeon feathers
And the occasional leg of a bovine

I am

My mother
My father
My sister
My brother
My niece

I am

Montoya

I am

Rodriguez

And those that came before me



thick thot