

**Unspeakable Silences,
When Poetry Ceases to be a Luxury,
Black Tulips,
My Eggs**

Melissa A. Castillo-Garsow, Yale University

Melissa Castillo-Garsow is a Mexican-American writer, journalist, and scholar currently pursuing a PhD in American Studies and African American Studies at Yale University. Her short stories and poetry have been published in various journals including *The Acentos Review*, *La Bloga*, *Hispanic Culture Review*, and *Hinchas de Poesia*. Her first novel, *Pure Bronx*, co-written with Fordham Professor Mark Naison, is due for release in October 2013 from Augustus Publishing.

Melissa completed her Master's degree in English with a concentration in Creative Writing at Fordham University in 2011. Prior to that she was awarded a Bachelor of Arts from New York University summa cum laude with a double major in Journalism and Latin American Studies. A former employee of NBC News, *El Diario/La Prensa* and Launch Radio Networks, Melissa has had articles and reviews published in a wide variety of forums including CNN.com, *Latin Beat Magazine*, *University Wire*, *El Diario/La Prensa*, *Women's Studies*, *Words. Beats. Life: The Global Journal of Hip-Hop Culture*, and *The Bilingual Review*. Melissa is an active scholar in the fields of English literature, American Studies, African American Studies and Latin American/Latino Studies. At Yale, she focuses on the study of Afro-Latino history and culture in the 20th Century.

Unspeakable Silences

She asks me,
are you doing the work?
She already knows the answer.

I am still afraid
to say
one drink didn't knock me out
a golden glittered breast
didn't put me on my back
an expensive dinner
didn't change what that was.

I am still living in unspeakable spaces.

Still waking up to that glass
still pretending its reflection
doesn't relight that flame somehow
convinced
if I portray that warrior on my back
I will become her.

But my unspeakables define me—
drain the light from my eyes like
those 'episodes' drain my bank and
what I've said has never transformed
me. Maybe,
I said it to the wrong people.
Maybe,
my silences can't be spoken—
they need to be screamed.

I am a scarred woman, I've drawn
battle lines more than once, lost
most of the time.

As a Latina, I should push the scars
away, embrace every curve
pray for an arroz y gandules behind
love how I jiggle. But this is our secret—
we terrorize our bodies as much as anyone
die in endless parades of beauty
just usually, with less money.

This is my secret.
When I came out as Latina,
the mirror laughed harder
mocked my eyelined insecurities,

taunted me with preguntas:
Can you really keep up this lie about eating tortillas?

It is a generation of anythings
we are told we can do anything
be anything.
Nobody told me anything could kill
possibilities turned to cold sweats
vomits, pills, hospitals, doctors
diagnosis.
How many Hail Mary's, father?

Now silence is my penance
my knuckles bitten and tender
my face crushed against pavement
my body pinned to the floor.

I wish I could call myself
a black feminist lesbian mother warrior
a chicana dyke-feminist, tejana patlache poet
but I don't know how to be her
except to feel
her warmed breath over worn pages
I am stuck where she tells me I'm in danger.

I'm terrified to share her passions, afraid
to stretch out wide, afraid
to confront my addictions, still worried
I won't be able to explain
a pain that kills
a pain that drives a pen to paper
a pain that made the needle feel like
relief.

I am no warrior. I am
a survivor.
Fifteen years since I first
bloodied my knuckles
my hands are still bleeding
my skin is raw and
I am here etching this lifeline
from belly button to index finger
avoiding scabs if I need to.

I display my truths at the alter
in barely there metaphors
unblinded by all that is missing—
sugared skulls, pan dulce
the pictures of the dead—
I could only manage fruit this time.

In silence I inscribed Mexico on hip
slender graceful chili peppers
hidden under winter layers because
I was tongue tied when
cousins made fun of my acento
when
classmates made fun of my father's
when
professor said there was too much Spanish
when
my poetry was tweeted 'too Latino'

I said nothing and now,
I write everything
protected
by the two eyes looking
out from my back
dark and discerning
she is my ancient mother,
my warrior.

So here is my (self) diagnosis.
I am a poet survivor.
Was it the second time I was told
I was standing on the edge or
the third or fifth?
For some reason I have survived
lived
to feel this pain and explain it
to find this silence and
disobey it.

Here's the real unspeakable.
I am angry on this page.
Because
I never thought about living
and now
I pray my body keeps going.
Because
I am angry for those
days nights hours minutes
confined by my mind
(I refuse it's my mind)
that left me tied down
tortured—as if
I were an addict.
I am not an addict
and never have been
because now,
He asks me to forget

crashing plates
the reverberation of
hour long tirades
the trembling fear
or the summer
that cemented 15 years
of wasted promises—
I wouldn't if I could.
Because now,
they tell me it was
the wrong DNA
faulty wiring
some accident of upbringing
chance—and I am angrier.

So I'll say it.
Some words have become empty in my life
and they called me a little Mexican hipster—
Little. When all
I wanted was to write a big poem but
big is someone who does not shrink
away and
I've perfected the art of silence
each day I practiced saying one thing less
my mouth a mess of peanut
butter cotton balls lodged
in my esophagus.

But sorry is for those
who can't pronounce
lo siento and lo siento has grown old
and honestly,
my silence could last a lifetime.

The skulls come at me
laughing
taunting
pushing me to dodge a serpent
dodge the serpents stumble
into snake lady who
inspires everything—
but death and
I've stopped ducking.

I've hidden for decades already
played the chorus to your lives, besides
Can you really blame me for what I've done?

When Poetry Ceases to be a Luxury

If poetry is what I feel and
theory what I know,
why do I only feel that I know
on the blank space of this page
between words
amongst images—there—
I am no longer broken

Poetry was like exercise
a whim discarded with guilt
until I stopped protecting myself
from him
from his inattention
and gave myself over to her
if only for a stanza

I stretched myself to her
let her brush my hair
wash my back
peel me like an orange and
expose my seeds

I tried to hide that messy
fleshy matter but she knows
crumbles up the page
crosses out the abusive lines
I cannot lie to her.

I used to write on my side until
I realized my side was my center
planted where I never wanted
to dig beneath distrusted dreams
I covered in vulnerabilities
of rings and bangs

A paralytic poetry of world travels
in linguistic trickery—immobilized—
until I accepted my sickness
accepted that it didn't define me
accepted a different voice

A softer voice hoarse from
shouting over headphones
worn down by doubt
washed away by fluids
I put my ear to the ground and heard
nothing stuck a stethoscope to my

heart and heard a murmur

She can't live in my body anymore
but sometimes,
she sits beside me at the window
washes my hair in the shower
lies beside me in bed chanting
Poetry will be ... will be ...

Black Tulips

Reconfigure
Reengage
this constructed decentralization

a postmodern aesthetic
textured both
autobiographically and autographically

the transparence and opacity
of its diachronic synchronicity—
an intentional catachresis

Essentially
nothing—
when did it stop meaning

the green blades you bled on
make sense
the black tulips you kissed

of the mountains of bloody leaves crushed
beneath the weight of two bodies
intertwined—

like linked chains or
candy necklaces that get eaten
one by one.

The soft cushion of an uncut lawn.
I pick up a black tulip and press it in my book.
I pick up a blood stained blade and put it in my book.

My Eggs

Name her to me.

I pull up a seat at the table, smooth the tablecloth, crack an egg, but it is bloody inside.

She evades. Defining womanhood. Sanitized.

Is anything sacred?

Shocks me to remember. A slave in the North. When slaves were men and women were white.

Unwomaned. She slides away into the shadows. Another white girl painted brown, another truth violated.

But she also sees:

(auto)biography, respectability, authenticity.

Tell her to me.

Poach me an egg. Tender and slow so I can feel the stillness of a little room, a big parlor.

Endures the slippage from the porch, the unhealed scars of the flesh, still the marketing of her flesh, crammed into a crammed living space, she talks sweet instead.

Attend to her.

I learned language from eggs, learned meaning from eggs, when language was wonder - full.

Uovo. Huevo. Egg.

Call her to me.

Every body has its out. Every flesh has its scars. Every imagination it's possibilities, Every beginning should have its egg.

But she can imagine without possibilities. Return the gaze without lifting her eye. Birth without gaining a pound. Stand off.

Fertilize me.

Bring her to me.

Leave it runny. I'll scramble it with chicharrón and let the yolk seep into that hard skin until it is tender and chewable.

Salty sweet. Fancy Sweet. Shadowy Stone. Shimmering Bone. Fake fuss. I polite cuss.

What was never and is not.

So she writes her way into being. Tells on him, tells on her.

Read: there's too much sex here.

Read: she's scrambling sex here.

Read: my private has to be made public.

Read: I'm gendering my ungender.

Sing her to me.

Forget nothing.

the warring triples, a serpent's tongue lashing at her peeping ways and then drawn together under a wide skirt, across tables, across countries, bundled in a wide sarape in the heart of the border, wading across the rivers of sunburnt imperialism.

Because one is never quite finished.