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CULTURAL WORK

## Casi Víspera / Colibrí Resucitado Crónica

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### Abstract

Susana Chávez-Silverman is a Califas-born U.S. Latina writer and flaneuse who (against all odds) is also an educator, although she mostly laments what's happened to la cacademia over the last decade or so. She still finds joy and hope in being la High Priestess of SLOW to her students and former students, some of which are among her closest compinches. Of the two crónicas included in this special curated issue of cultural works in *PORTAL* under the theme Transitions and Dislocations, she says: 'My writing/life took a major detour in 2016. For most of the year, I wrote nothing at all. Or rather, nothing except e-mail after email: to administrators, colleagues all over the world, attorneys, friends and relatives. I had scheduled my sabbatical in order to finish a book project, but had been derailed by a Title IX investigation and plagiarism case at my home institution, and the accompanying anxiety and anger. I returned to my book over the summer, culling and editing hundreds of pages of primary texts (letters and emails). But this book is much longer—and truer—than anything I've written before and takes a different kind of writing energy, uninterrupted time, and commitment. Writing from a place of anger and anxiety doesn't serve this book. The two crónicas included in this special curated issue are not part of my book in progress, *Our Ubuntu, Montenegro: del Balboa Café al Apartheid and Back*. Rather, they were my way of easing back into my (he)art space. 'Casi Víspera' proves I *did* write something in 2016 after all (other than email, I mean)—I had no memory of it until early this year! 'Black Holes' talks about precisely this (remembering and not). I was determined not to let 2016's plagiarism/Title IX toxic double helix continue to poison me. I wanted to begin 2017 with a bang, and wrote this for my son, for his 30th birthday.'

### Keywords

**Susana Chávez-Silverman; crónica; chronicle**

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28 febrero, 2016

Claramonte, Califas

*For my sister, Sarita,*

*con amor*

Anoche, recogí on campus a mi advisee Amanda y otra de mis devotees, la Madison Orozco. We had a three-hour cena en *Trop Mex* (pero esa es otra) pero first las traje a casa, pa' show them around y para dar la housekey a Amanda for her house-sitting gig. Lo primero que dijo la Madison, ni bien entró, fue—*this house is so YOU, Profa*. Justo lo que había dicho Amanda, last month. Me sentí relieved—y levemente agasajada.

Ahora bien: here's where things get *really* strange. Salimos al patio, para explicarles los ins 'n' outs de las plantas. It was dusk. That sort of dimming, slightly hazy light. En una, exclamó la Madison—*Profa, there's a dead baby bird over here!* Miré—confieso que I didn't really want to see—y sólo vi una especie de pequeño bulto gris. Pero crouching down vi que en efecto, he was just ... lying there boca arriba, plopped down next to the coiled manguera. He wasn't actually dead, pero el poor little vato jadeaba de tal forma—his teensy chest heaved up and down tan violentamente—que it mos def looked like he didn't have long pal mundo.

Irrumpí en llanto—sé que tiendo a un little hair Drama Queen, pero te juro que *this* was mos def a first! Un colibrí posado is one thing. Strange, insólito, I thought, cuando vi dos así, sitting stock still, posados en una rama, en el Montalvo Arts Center. Hace años. En la primavera del 2008. Ese artist Retrete en el bosque encantado, where I was beginning to wake up from my Bella Durmiente sleep, en mi otra vida (pero esa *sí* que es otra). Eso era weird, como dije, pero oddly poignant: esas incongruously drab-colored, upright figures, como teensy totems que no revelaban nada de su singular magia.

Like Rima in *Green Mansions*, escribí back then, en ese momento cuando Abel la ve en su plain-Jane calico, hanging back shyly en los shadows, meekly nursing him back to consciousness después de su snakebite, or waiting on her dizque abuelo, el Nuflo, a la tenue luz del fuego. Abel didn't even recognize that beige domesticated creature; no la podía reconciliar con la iridescent, warbling, in constant motion bird-girl que le había hechizado.

Anygüey, tal era yo—como el Mr Abel—ante los colibríes posados en el Montalvo Arts Center, aunque en estos últimos años, I've grown more accustomed to seeing them like that en el health trail. Pero este pequeñajo de anoche te juro que he took it to a different level. ¿Habrase visto jamás un hummingbird flat on his back?

La cabecita estaba ladeada as I leaned in, como para...comprobar o confirmar que he really was, en efecto, un colibrí. Se veía heart-wrenchingly vulnerable, según, in need of imminent last rites. He was gray, panza arriba, y como dije, jadeaba y temblaba. Y vi su inconfundible pico, mini-aguja, almost ... resting, on the ground. Confirmé así que simón: juvenile colibrí. En eso me sobrecogieron unas ganas locas de tocarle, acurrucarle: ese adorable beak, the grayish-white baby plumas bristling on his little heaving chest. Pero me contuve. Alguna vestigial science-y factoid de la infancia me reprimió. Recordaba, dimly, algo de no querer contaminarle de mi scent, para que su mom o sus compinches no le rechazaran.

Al final, las girls and I decidimos que lo mejor sería just ... leave him there. Es febrero, casi casi marzo, pero after esas torrential lluvias la primera semana del año, que auguraban un El Niño for the ages—and an end to our 5-year sequía—since then, na' de na'. Dispiritingly

balmy SoCal summer weather, día tras día. Pero la verdad, esto pintaba mejor para nuestro little friend.

I had horrible visions of wild creatures coming en la noche, pa' devorarlo. Así tumbado, boca arriba como el moteca de Cortázar, y—just like him—desprovisto de su magic, powerless. Intenté convencerme de que un morsel tan magro wouldn't be enough temptation como para que un tecolote or hawk se molestara en navegar entre las ramas del pino o del eucalyptus que me bordean el patio. And even someone tan physics-deficient como yo entiende que las new, medio trailer trashy beige plasticky fences que instalaron hace un par de años son demasiado slippery para los gatos y too high para los coyotes. Y los squirrels, musité paranoica, son legumbreros, ¿que no?

Anygüey, esta mañana, con heavy heart y una overwhelming sensation of dread and foreboding—OB-vio, la definición misma de la ANSIEDAD (pretty much my homeostasis desde mid-November, desde que me he visto ensnared in the toxic double helix de un caso de academic dishonesty metastasized into a false Title IX grievance de la condená plagiadora ¡contra mí!)—salí al patio convinced de que tendría que scoop up y enterrar al miniature avian finadito. Debatí entre merciful myopia y cruel claridad, eventualmente I opted for the latter y me puse las gafas, no vaya a ser que pisara al tiny cadaver.

To my shock, under an eerily overcast, si también overly sultry sky (where oh *where's* the damn El Niño?), miré donde había dejado la manguera last night, al ladito mero del casi-corpse, y ... ¡nada! Te lo juro: *niks*, nada, nothing at all. No sign of him. I stared at the spot for a while, medio alelada. Luego, I methodically searched the patio: the shoddily-painted (por ese dizque curandero handyman, el Enrique), peeling jacuzzi cover y las plantas encima, todas las otras larger free-standing plants. Medio pendejamente I scanned the fence-tops, the barbecue, hasta el NorCal windchime que me regaló mi hermana Sarita. Pero nada...

Reluctantly, I headed back inside. Antes de salir pa' la yoga class (necesitaba unos downward caninos malamente), mandé un textual a Sarita, about el mini-Lazarus milagro colibrí. Como ella sabe un huevo de arcane mystical symbols, Native American totems y toda la onda shamánca (LITTLE EYE: this is literal, ella hizo un cursillo y todo), pensé que for sure she'd be able to shed some luz on what was going on. Digo, el cosmic *meaning* de que este vato estuviera al mere mere borde de la muerte pa' luego resucitar.

Fíjate que en los últimos momentos de la yoga class—en *savasana*, esa deeply relaxing, occasionally acid-trippy guided meditation—me dio una especie de anagnorisis: ese injured, stunned colibrí... *c'est moi!* Tal y como él había estado down for the count pero *no* knocked out del todo, I too must pick myself up, dust myself off, deliberately disentangle myself from “the snare of the fowler” (Psalm 91:3, per mi BFF Wim, a Catholic priest), unfurl my alas, and fly.

Back from yoga, vi que mi hermana Sarita (con quien siempre he tenido un psychic bond, en todo caso) me había textualizado:—*Down, pero not out! Colibrí can change the direction of its flight at will—up, down, back 'n' forth. It can find the sweetness amidst the thorns. That's the picture I'm getting: winded, battered but bouncing back after a respite. Just as you will after your trip. See?* Te dije que Sarita can read the signs.

So ... he aquí: en esta casi-*vispera* de mi viaje patrás a la Madre Patria, Colibrí magic me ha mostrado que I can—I must—write (myself free).