

Poem title: Litany  
 Poet: Asiel Adán Sánchez  
 From: *M/ /OTHERLAND*, Asiel Adán Sánchez  
 Publisher: Revarena, 2021. Cover artwork is by Mexican painter Fabián Cháirez.  
 Commentator: Ana Maria Gomides, whose Foreword is republished here with permission.

Asiel querido,  
 do you know how much you've taught me, corazón, about myself by simply being yours?

I'm often convinced that I'm little more than faint imprints of pencil marks on white paper, erased over and over and over again, pero contigo, me siento vista by reading you, I keep writing myself.

thank you for sharing all of this with me, the poems held here are so intensely visual, in both structure and content, that I've come to interpret them as a collection of paintings, spanning across a variety of genres — portrait, still life, landscape— whilst also being, somehow, autorretratos of ourselves.

como / con Frida you've sought to reclaim the image of Indigenous Latinx folks from those who colonised us, stole our diverse artistic practices, then dared desecrate our ancestors by depicting them as faceless, nameless blurs in their horrid paintings.

todes somos migrantes.  
 como / con mujeres before you, you've done so by defiantly exposing the ongoing pain and trauma they caused en tu gente, then turning it into beauty by emphasizing your collective strength to challenge, fight back, survive and overcome.

in these paintings, you've incorporated cultural practice, imagery and geographic scenery from tu tierra natal, where women who've been painting flowers on skulls for millennia, once buried part of your umbilical cord in earth as richly coloured as your skin, ensuring you will always be just as much a part of Mexico, as that terrats of you.

reading *m/ /otherland* reminded me that faint imprints of erased pencil on white paper are still stubbornly visible and impossible to fully remove; that I can trace over those lines with the same deep red of pau-brasil seeds, as effortlessly and for as long as my heart pumps our blood pelo meu corpo negro e indigeno. I found myself in your work, in a moment when I really needed to feel seen.

muchas gracias, cariño, por tu existencia y presencia, por tu palabras que son pinturas, por tomar de la mano a quien se acerque a tus páginas.

Ana Maria Gomides  
 Febrero 2021  
 Narm / Birraranga

(*sonnets*) 12 – 13

12

but they have lost their faces  
 I feather my empty rest with writing  
 I gave up relationships to right it  
 Orpheus didn't have to make that choice  
 in the middle of an argument he starts  
 folding what happened still happens  
 the only crime where the judicial narrative is of the victim  
 if life means nothing then this is everything  
 don't forget me  
 looking back  
 stand tall and stalled when he looks back  
 the day signals as closed as Orpheus's signature  
 the damp down here flowers into doubt  
 the blues understand it's the full bolt

13  
 the blues understand it's the full bolt  
 but they have lost their flower presses  
 I feather my empty restraint with years  
 I gave up religions to right it  
 Orpheus didn't have to make the chorus  
 in the mileage of an argument he folds my clothes  
 what happened is still hardware  
 the only crime where the judicial narrative is of the victim  
 if life measures then this is everything  
 don't forget me  
 look back  
 you and your men my mother said  
 as far as final words go  
 you don't have much luck with men do you

Poem Title: (sonnets) 12 - 13  
 Poet: Claire Gaskin  
 From: *Eurydice Speaks*, Claire Gaskin  
 Publisher: Hunter Publishers, 2020  
 Commentator: Angela Costi

According to Ancient Greek myth, philological discourse and classical studies, many things were done to Eurydice. She was chased and almost raped by Aristaeus. She fled from him, only to be bitten by a venomous snake. She died while she was dancing on her wedding day, or soon after. She was sent to the Underworld. We know more about Orpheus than we do about Eurydice. She was given no opportunity to speak; to question her relegation to Hades to dwell among those who had murdered or offended the gods. Her short life and long death orbited around a decision by her captor, Hades, and by a backward glance from her husband. There's an injustice that beckons redress. Finally, Eurydice is given a significant voice through Claire Gaskin's 57 linked sonnets in *Eurydice Speaks*. We learn about Eurydice's dualities as a nymph and creator, daughter and wife, victim and survivor. The most fulfilling way to read the sonnets is in one sitting as there's a build of connections and dissonance – one line in a sonnet is rediscovered in another and another, altered at times to reveal a new meaning, an addition or subtraction to what has come before. There's a circling back that is deeply satisfying with the final sonnet bringing to rest the first line in sonnet 1, which is life's perfect metaphor:

*I stumble on steps flowing with water* [first line]  
*stumbling on steps flowing with water* [last line]

I found it challenging to choose one sonnet as I have at least 18 favourites. So, I chose two: sonnets 12 and 13. They showcase the distinct word play. In four lines of sequential 'same with change', there's honesty portrayed through highlighting how 'empty' is spent, correspondingly there is loss in order to live with integrity. These lines speak of the 'I' (whether it's Eurydice, the poet, the narrator or all three) honouring their path, which comes with sacrifice:

*I feather my empty rest with writing*  
*I gave up relationships to right it*  
*I feather my empty restraint with years*  
*I gave up religions to right it*

The sonnets amplify the myth's contemporary resonance through a relationship's tension and a mother's words:

*in the middle of an argument he starts*  
*folding what happened still happens*

*in the mileage of an argument he folds my clothes*

*you and your men my mother said*

There is the sway of a countermyth here as Eurydice questions Orpheus's choices. Further, she is aware of the power his 'signature' has over her life:

*the day signals as closed as Orpheus's signature*

And then there's her stance to consider:

*don't forget me*

*looking back*

*stand tall and stalled when he looks back*

*if life measures then this is everything*

*don't forget me*

*look back*

It's clear that she wants him to remember her. There's a sense that she's seeking separation. Did she want him to look back, and so not resume a life with him? Did she realise she would be his shadow no matter where she dwelt? These are the tantalising questions brought to the surface as Eurydice voices her alternative thoughts.

These sonnets also provide a compelling line that is repeated without one word changed:

*the only crime where the judicial narrative is of the victim*

This is a timely, aphoristic line given the countless women, sexually assaulted, and retraumatised by the court system, if they are brave enough to speak their truth. – Angela Costi

Ella O'Keefe

*Scratchcard*

whole corners for televisions  
that burst from brackets  
skylights in the trees

on the car park roof  
workers hold phones  
up to the hidden moon

stolen descriptor of piebald  
for the 2003 patchy render  
marking a defunct partnership

a jacket draped on the road  
near a construction site  
body evaporated on asphalt

your whistle reaches  
peak utility as a covert pulse  
to those dismantling an evil apparatus

a puckered air  
tunes up the street  
for its role as conduit

drops of water  
pull the wires and guts  
from the smart lamp post