

Gabriela ROMÁN

Axolotl

I have felt like a stranger ever since I can remember. Membership is a foreign feeling. Some people say we all belong to a particular element: I am made of a pinch of air, an earth spoon, a bunch of water, and a lot of fire. Many elements inside me, any element is mine.

When I first learned about amphibians I thought, *I have found a cousin*. They are able to live in two environments: water and earth. They can belong to two different lives. Or, better, they don't have to belong anywhere.

Then, I realized that Drama is also an amphibian. That can explain how I ended up as a playwright. How I ended up here. As an amphibian, Drama can survive either on the page or on the stage. Water and earth.

As literature, Drama is related to water. Water is language. A phenomenal force that breaks borders and shapes landscapes. Or a gentle creek that whispers new worlds in a reader's ears. Earth is the stage. That is where language plants itself. Drama, as an amphibian, has the opportunity to keep its feet on the ground. Earth offers the opportunity of materiality, of corporality. The great playwright Federico García Lorca said, "Theatre is poetry that rises from the book and becomes human enough to talk and shout, weep and despair."

Drama has the ability to change not only environment but also shape, body. Young amphibians generally undergo metamorphosis from larva with gills to adult air-breathing forms with lungs. The same metamorphosis happens when a play is performed. The written word, the force of water, emerges on the Earth's surface and terraforms itself. First a submerged creature, Drama becomes movement, breath, space, light and silence. It becomes a body powered by air.

Amphibians are vital for many ecosystems because they transfer energy from aquatic environments to land. This transfer is like libation—take, for example, Shakespeare, whose new words fed the English language. Amphibians inhabit a wide variety of habitats—as this panel proves—and they gain sustenance from many cultures and sources.

As a Mexican, I could be an *ajolote*, an endemic amphibian from the Valley of Mexico. *Ajolote*, *axolotl*, is a word in Nahuatl, the most spoken indigenous language in Mexico. Axolotl comes from: *Atl*, water; *xolotl*, animal or monster with soft skin. Its being is related to movement and life. For me Drama is that: movement and life.

Axolotl can also regenerate organs and tissues—same with Drama, which is able to regenerate partially or completely at every show, which loses legs and then generates new ones. The ability to regenerate is related to performance and to collaboration: every interpretation by actors, directors, etc, reinvents the play, regenerates its tissues—and even though Drama is self-sufficient, every

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collaborator is needed to complete the process set in motion by the playwright. This power only belongs to Theatre. Pity on you other genres.

I prefer to be an axolotl over any other creature, by far, because axolotls reach adulthood without undergoing the usual metamorphosis. Instead of developing lungs and taking to the land, adults remain aquatic. It means I can remain in a book and still be alive, still be partially earth, still be Theatre. I do believe that Drama is literature and is a complete work even without setting its feet on the ground (that is to say, the stage).

Drama is potential. It's a bomb about to explode and a bomb imploding inside the book's covers simultaneously, like a version of Schrödinger's cat. Schrödinger's amphibian. But instead of being alive and dead, it lives simultaneously two lives.

We are in critical danger of extinction. We have soft skin capable of feeling everything around us, which is also very fragile. We are in critical danger of extinction. I'm talking about both Theatre and Axolotls. Especially in Mexico, with audience and cultural support declining every day. I hope we can survive. I hope we won't be added to a list of mythological creatures that only live in one habitat, the habitat of "Once upon a time..."

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