

10/27/2023: WRITING LOVE IN THE AGE OF IRONY

Love, arguably the most powerful human emotion, is a perennial challenge to the rational grip of narrative. Add to it the extra tripwire of irony, as seen in the ubiquity of rom-coms on everyone's screens. Is it possible to give true love (rather than "true love") its due in words? In every literary culture? What literary work has succeeded in making you truly feel that emotion?

1. **Maricela GUERRERO (Mexico)**

Macochi pitentzin

Manocoxteca pitelontzin

Macochi cochi noxocoyotl

— *Náhuatl lullaby*

Amor empieza por desasosiego,

Solicitud, ardores y desvelos;

crece con riesgos, lances y recelos,

susténtase de llantos y de ruego.

— *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*

The lullaby you have just heard is in Náhuatl, one of the many indigenous languages of Abya Yala. Despite the countless attacks on its speakers, Náhuatl remains the majority indigenous language in Mexico, spoken today by 1.6 million of the country's 127 million inhabitants. It was also the language that my father's family abandoned when they left Santa María Tlaltihuizia, Tlaxcala, and migrated to Mexico City in the late 1930s. I like to imagine my ancestors being rocked to sleep, then rocking their own children to sleep with this melody. I like to imagine love moving through the history of those voices, traveling all the way down to me and my children as I raise them.

The next poem, the sonnet by Sor Juana, was written in the seventeenth century. There, the nun precisely defines the trance of falling in love. Ahead of her time – well-read – Sor Juana would save us years of therapy and suffering caused by love and lovesickness.

Both the sonnet originally written in my mother tongue and the song I learned to lull my children tell the stories and speak the language of love that shape my conception of the world. On the one hand, a mythical language whose worldview makes me attentive to the fact that all living things are part of a

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body I share the world with. On the other, an imperial language in which, with a profound vocation for joy, I try to recover that worldview through poetry.

This is why the stories, songs, and poems we place on our lips to win someone's love or heal our broken hearts are essential in recovering the voices of communities and territories where nature is not a resource to be extracted, but bodies with whom we share the world: bodies of water, mountains, plants, trees, bacteria, brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, wind, and earth.

In this sense, the Zapatista uprising of 1994 emerged from a dignified rage in defense of the land and communities threatened by extractivist projects. At the same time as the First Manifesto from the Lacandon Jungle was released, the Zapatista Women's Revolutionary Law began to circulate. This document expressed women's demands for participation in public life, the right to have work and a fair salary, the right to marry or not, as well as the right to decide on how many children to have, contraceptive measures, health, and education: the same rights that Sor Juana had defended for herself and other women three centuries before.

The work of Rosario Castellanos also echoes in the rights demanded by this Law. In her novel *Balún Canán*, Castellanos recounts the many forms of oppression that operate on women in Mexico, as well as the many forms of dispossession that have operated for over five hundred years on indigenous communities in Abya Yala. For her part, Sor Juana also wrote in Náhuatl and recovered the words of Afro-descendant communities in Mexico, attentive to the colonial oppression of these groups.

In the recovery of these languages, and in the writing of environmental activists all over the world, we find stories of love that offer us not only forms of struggle against extractivism, but also an erotic ethics that illuminates the search for another possible world. I will close with the words of Zoque poet Mikeas Sánchez, whose deep love for the earth offers us courage and company in defending it:

Sonerampäte

Minä' äjn' najsomo,
nijpya'ä mij ntänh'kutyam
ntyaj'yajpapäis
Ntä' isanhdziramä' te' toya, te
yajxu'ijtkuy,
te' tujkuyis pyämi'.
Sonerampäte'
jinh'mi' natztame'

Somos millones

Ven a mi tierra,

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Instala tus máquinas aniquiladoras
de ternura,
muéstranos el dolor y la desesperanza,
el impacto de las balas.
Somos millones
y no te tenemos miedo.

We Are Millions

Come to my land,
install your peace-destroying machines,
show us pain and despair,
bullet wounds.
We are millions
and we are unafraid.

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