2002

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Ann Folwell Stanford

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Cover Page Footnote
This article is from an earlier iteration of Diálogo which had the subtitle "A Bilingual Journal." The publication is now titled "Diálogo: An Interdisciplinary Studies Journal."

This rincón creativo is available in Diálogo: https://via.library.depaul.edu/dialogo/vol6/iss1/16
WHAT THE BODY REMEMBERS
By Ann Folwell Stanford

Through an arch of massed Cieba trees
blue mountains stretch away to where husbands
and sons slept before the shelling began. Escape
was as pointless as catching water in a net.
Our children's bodies?
Flung like rag dolls in the street.

And the sky so blue it blocked our breath.

Now instead of war,
Earth shakes us over and over,
splits itself like a loaf of bread,
flings mountains against villages,
roars up through concrete slabs,
our lives sucked dry as marrowbones.

Look here. A boulder shattered my front yard,
the walls of my house crumpled fine as
harina.
My child's bed, snapped like straw.

In the alberge, thousands of tents
burn in Salvadoran sun. 500 families
share one kitchen pitched in mud.
We sleep on mud, peel crusted mud
from our children's faces, curse
and bless the steamy rains
as we pound corn for tortillas,
stare into the distance
where tents sit like little boats.

In one of them, though, something like mercy.
Clelia, whose slumped body appears dead,
has not been shot today, has not been tortured, not raped,
hasn't watched her house fall today.

Today she gives herself to her neighbor's hands.
Like a delicate sonata, the woman's fingers
play over Clelia's skin. She strokes
trapped memory of outraged muscles:
blood in the streets, blood on the face,
orchids under her skin,
a soldier's gun, a husband's fist.

Sinew and heart open in Clelia
like delicate blossoms as touch
unlocks the body's nightmare.
History's wound speaks secrets,
a glossalalia of doves,
grief fluttering through fingers
of the healer's wounded hands.

IN A DOORWAY
By Ann Folwell Stanford

At the foot of Guazapa, high in the mountains of El Salvador,
Lake Suchitlán spreads its storied fingers among pines
and yellow butterflies that ride the air like dancers.

Up here one can look down on hawks as they soar
over treetops, can see flame trees' red umbrellas
punctuating soft hills with exclamation.

In a doorway, a child of five stands barefoot, half in shadow,
half in light, on a threshold of stucco and wood.
He is soft against the harsh geometrics of his space.

Behind him a slit of dark, night's remnant,
as day yawns and opens its relucant gate,
pouring light on the still exhausted world.

Caught between dark and light, inside and out,
he doesn't move. Quiet, he watches day
unfold before him like an empty hand.

Too young to have seen war, he has eaten
from its plate of rotting leftovers, has watched its claw
continue to rake across souls of brothers, aunts.

The child's body has sensed rage's tight fist,
little bombs he cannot defuse, has heard them
explode over and over in voices of bitter men.

He has also known earth's treachery, has seen
a massive serpent heave and swell beneath the street,
crack it open, bring down walls, shatter glass.

But it is his mother's sorrow that follows him
everywhere, a bundle of sticks tied to his back.
He carries her silence as though it were half the sky.

In dreams, he sees his mother slough her sadness
like an old dress, open her arms and, with him, soar
above flame trees, beyond the light of Suchitlán.