

up on time. He caught my mama in the kitchen, then chased her to the bedroom and smacked her until she passed out. The doctor said my *apá* broke her nose, but Rocky called him a God-Damned liar and told my grandma my mama fell on the maple dresser. Rocky felt real bad. He was scared too cause he thought the doctor might report him. After he paid the doctor—cash—he bought the pearls. The next day we got dressed up and went to visit mama at the hospital. She had a private room, so I got to sit on her bed. Right before we got there Rocky stopped to buy flowers, you know, at the place on the corner. They cost ten dollars. Rocky felt bad. He bought me and Asunción small bouquets too. I dried mine later, but Asunción threw hers in the garbage. She hates Rocky.”

“Do you?”

“Neh. Besides, she asked for it.”

“Huh?”

“Cause she tried to talk back.”

“What about the pearls?”

“What about them?” Lina said, stifling a yawn. She got off the bed, then put the pearls back in their velvet bed. I followed her out the room and to the kitchen where we gorged on chocolate cake.

Marta, she later told me, did not immediately comprehend the pearl’s perfection, nor beauty. Her swollen nose and eyes ringed with purpose were covered with gauze. But in time she wore them. They were added to the collection of pins and earrings lying in the drawer.

Soon after, Rocky gifted his wife with a new jewelry box with velvet-lined drawers, one large enough to hold the growing jewelry collection of Marta la güera.

Do You Take?

Bernice Zamora

so you wish to marry me,
wash for me, clean for me,
type my papers, tie my shoes,
iron my clothes, and cook for me.
So it would please you to be
this woman’s wife.

No, querido.
I would not ask
that of another
human being.



Para un Revolucionario

Lorna Dee Cervantes

You speak of art
and your soul is like snow,
a soft powder raining from your
mouth,
covering my breasts and hair.
You speak of your love of mountains,
freedom,
and your love for a sun
whose warmth is like una liberación
pouring down upon brown bodies.
Your books are of the souls of men,
carnales with a spirit
that no army, pig or ciudad
could ever conquer.
You speak of a new way,
a new life.

When you speak like this
I could listen forever.

Pero your voice is lost to me, carnal,
in the wail of tus hijos,
in the clatter of dishes
and the pucker of beans upon the stove.
Your conversations come to me
de la sala where you sit,
spreading your dream to brothers,
where you spread that dream like damp clover
for them to trod upon,
when I stand here reaching

para ti con manos bronceas that spring from mi espíritu⁷
(for I too am Raza).

Pero, it seems I can only touch you
with my body.
You lie with me
and my body es la hamaca
that spans the void between us.

Hermano Raza,
I am afraid that you will lie with me
and awaken too late
to find that you have fallen
and my hands will be left groping
for you and your dream
in the midst of la revolución.

A Woman Was Raped

Veronica Cunningham

a woman
was raped
by her father
yesterday
and she was only
thirteen
and
i never laugh
at rape jokes
another woman
was raped
on her first date
and
i kant laugh
at rape
i just kant laugh

7. for you with bronzed hands that spring from my spirit

at rape
another
was raped
by a man
of a different
color
political
perhaps,
fucked
for sure
another woman
by her husband
but that's
with the law
of property
and another
and another
and another
they have been
violated
by more
than a penis
they've suffered
by the law
with policemen
in the courts
in society
inside themselves
with guilt
or shame
because
people believe
the victim
should be
blamed
and i'll be raped
with every
woman
yet
i kant laugh
i kant forget

YOU CRAMP MY STYLE, BABY

You cramp my style, baby
when you roll on top of me
shouting, "Viva La Raza"
at the top of your prick.

You want me como un taco,
dripping grease,
or squeezing masa through my legs,
making tamales for you
out of my daughters.

You "mija"
"mija" "mija" me
until I can scream

and then you tell me,
"Esa, I LOVE
this revolution!
Come on Malinche,
gimme some more!"

- Lorna Dee
Cervantes

NOTHING EVER CHANGES

Sun rises every morning
Flowers still ah growing

Rain or Shine

Everything still ah going
Tears fill her eyes
Tired ole lady
She's dying at seventy-five
She seen a lot of flowers bloom but can't stand to see another moon
Don't think she'll really miss anything
Neon signs still ah glowing
So happy inside
The baby finally arrived
Wait so long
The whole world seems so bright
Stars are all shining
Everything is going to be all right
Flowers still ah growing
Neon signs still ah glowing
Everything still ah going
Nothing ever really changes

You know it

Margie Escamilla Garcia, Fort Worth, Tx.

NOTES FROM A CHICANA "COED" for P. H.

To cry that the gabacho
is our oppressor is to shout
in abstraction, carnal.
He no more oppresses us
than you do now as you tell me
"It's the gringo who oppresses you, Babe."
You cry "The gringo is our oppressor!"
to the tune of \$20,000 to \$30,000
a year, brother, and I wake up
alone each morning and ask,
"Can I feed my children today?"

To make the day easier
I write poems about
pájaros, mariposas,
and the fragrance
of perfume I
smell on your collar;
you're quick to point out
that I must write
about social reality,
about "the gringo who
oppresses you, Babe."
And so I write about
how I worked in beet fields
as a child, about how I
worked as a waitress
eight hours at night to
get through high school,
about working as a
seamstress, typist, and field clerk
to get through college, and
about how, in graduate school
I held two jobs, seven days
a week, still alone, still asking,
"Can I feed my children today?"

To give meaning to my life
you make love to me in alleys,
in back seats of borrowed Vegas,
in six-dollar motel rooms
after which you talk about
your five children and your wife
who writes poems at home
about pájaros, mariposas,
and the fragrance of perfume
she smells on your collar.
Then you tell me how you



bear the brunt of the
gringo's oppression for me,
and how you would go
to prison for me, because
"The gringo is oppressing you, Babe!"

And when I mention
your G. I. Bill, you
Ford Fellowship, your
working wife, your
three gabacha guisas
when you ask me to
write your thesis,
you're quick to shout,
"Don't give that
Women's Lib trip, mujer,
that only divides us,
and we have to work
together for the movimiento;
the gabacho is oppressing us!"

Oye carnal, you may as well
tell me that moon water
cures constipation, that
penguin soup prevents crudas,
or that the Arctic Ocean is menudo,
because we both learned in the barrios,
man, that pigeon shit slides easier.

Still, because of the gabacho,
I must write poems about
pájaros, mariposas, and the fragrance
of oppressing perfume I smell somewhere.

Bernice Zamora, Stanford, Cal.

DOPEFIENDS TRIP

What you call me, man?
"Avicious, dangerous criminal!"
Huh?

Man, you are wrong
I ain't nothing
but
a pest to society
An insignificant dud
Who got caught
In this here shit called crime

A stone junkie
Whose high
Ends up congesting the States prisons
I do my little time on the streets
Petty thievery
Loaded out my mind
Then back to the pen
To do my life
On the installment plan
Payments paid daily in;
A.M.'s and P.M.'s

Pass the salt, brother
It might help,
This here prison stew

Hector Angulo, Chino, Cal.

BATO LOCO

Hardened by his battles in the barrios
Long years of waiting
Enduring prisons
In ignorance
or in patience (you be the judge)
For "El Grito"
Que ya llego
"Ya Basta"
"La Causa"
"Chicano Hand clap"
Con mucho orgullo

They are aware of their stigma
But ahora
They have undone the red band
of "El Bandido"

Orale carnal!
Ya stuvo
Con la carga
las pildoras
y el tokay
Se aca, con toda esa pinchi locura

Awareness permeated
The cold world of rock and iron
Pachuco/Tecato/Cholo
Transformation
Now moving the minds
De la comunida

Te estas aventando ya,
Ese Bato

Hector Angulo, Chino, Cal.

PREFACE

"I can live alone and I love to work."—MARY CASSATT

*"Allí está el detalle."**—CANTINFLAS

Gentlemen, ladies. If you please—these
are my wicked poems from when.
The girl grief decade. My wicked nun
years, so to speak. I sinned.

Not in the white-woman way.
Not as Simone voyeuring the pretty
slum city on a golden arm. And no,

not wicked like the captain of the bad
boy blood, that Hollywood hood-
lum who boozed and floozed it up,
hell-bent on self-destruction. Not me.
Well. Not much. Tell me,

* (Roughly translated: *There's the rub.*)

how does a woman who.
A woman like me. Daughter of
a daddy with a hammer and blistered feet
he'd dip into a washtub while he ate his dinner.
A woman with no birthright in the matter.

What does a woman inherit
that tells her how
to go?

My first felony—I took up with poetry.
For this penalty, the rice burned.
Mother warned I'd never wife.

Wife? A woman like me
whose choice was rolling pin or factory.
An absurd vice, this wicked wanton
writer's life.

I chucked the life
my father'd plucked for me.
Leapt into the salamander fire.
A girl who'd never roamed
beyond her father's rooster eye.
Winched the door with poetry and fled.
For good. And grieved I'd gone
when I was so alone.

In my kitchen, in the thin hour,
a calendar Cassatt chanted:
Repeat after me—
I can live alone and I love to . . .
What a crock. Each week, the ritual grief.
That decade of the knuckled knocks.

I took the crooked route and liked my badness.
Played at mistress.
Tattooed an ass.
Lapped up my happiness from a glass.
It was something, at least.

I hadn't a clue.

What does a woman
willing to invent herself
at twenty-two or twenty-nine
do? A woman with no who nor how.
And how was I to know what was unwise.

I wanted to be writer. I wanted to be happy.
What's that? At twenty. Or twenty-nine.
Love. Baby. Husband.
The works. The big palookas of life.
Wanting and not wanting.
Take your hands off me.

I left my father's house
before the brothers,
vagabonded the globe
like a rich white girl.
Got a flat.
I paid for it. I kept it clean.
Sometimes the silence frightened me.
Sometimes the silence blessed me.

It would come get me.
Late at night.
Open like a window,
hungry for my life.

I wrote when I was sad.
The flat cold.
When there was no love—
new, old—
to distract me.
No six brothers
with their Fellini racket.
No mother, father,
with their wise I told you.

I tell you,
these are the pearls
from that ten-year itch,
my jewels, my colicky kids
who fussed and kept
me up the wicked nights
when all I wanted was . . .
With nothing in the texts to tell me.

But that was then,
The who-I-was who would become the who-I-am.
These poems are from that hobbled when.

11TH OF JUNE, 1992
Hydra, Greece

Funding for completion of this manuscript was provided in part by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, for which I am grateful. I would also like to express my gratitude to the University of Texas at Austin and the Texas Institute of Letters for their generosity and support of my work. Finally, my sincerest thanks to editor Norma Alarcón for faith and, above all, patience.

Loose Woman

XX

They say I'm a beast.
And feast on it. When all along
I thought that's what a woman was.

They say I'm a bitch.
Or witch. I've claimed
the same and never winced.

They say I'm a *macho*, hell on wheels,
viva-la-vulva, fire and brimstone,
man-hating, devastating,
boogey-woman lesbian.
Not necessarily,
but I like the compliment.

The mob arrives with stones and sticks
to maim and lame and do me in.
All the same, when I open my mouth,
they wobble like gin.

Diamonds and pearls
tumble from my tongue.

Or toads and serpents.
Depending on the mood I'm in.

I like the itch I provoke.
The rustle of rumor
like crinoline.

I am the woman of myth and bullshit.
(True. I authored some of it.)
I built my little house of ill repute.
Brick by brick. Labored,
loved and masoned it.

I live like so.
Heart as sail, ballast, rudder, bow.
Rowdy. Indulgent to excess.
My sin and success—
I think of me to gluttony.

By all accounts I am
a danger to society.
I'm Pancha Villa.

I break laws,
upset the natural order,
anguish the Pope and make fathers cry.
I am beyond the jaw of law.
I'm *la desesperada*, most-wanted public enemy.
My happy picture grinning from the wall.

I strike terror among the men.
I can't be bothered what they think.
¡Que se vayan a la ching chang chong!
For this, the cross, the Calvary.
In other words, I'm anarchy.

I'm an aim-well,
shoot-sharp,
sharp-tongued,
sharp-thinking,
fast-speaking,
foot-loose,
loose-tongued,
let-loose,
woman-on-the-loose

loose woman.
Beware, honey.

I'm Bitch. Beast. *Macha*.
¡Wáchale!
Ping! Ping! Ping!
I break things.