

4 poets from the Cultural Gathering of Native Women  
“Yomoram jyayappapä’is jäyätzame”

**SEGUNDO ENCUENTRO CULTURAL DE MUJERES ORIGINARIAS**

**23-27 MAYO 2022**

**ENCUENTRO CULTURAL DE MUJERES ORIGINARIAS  
“YOMORAM JYAYAPPAPÄ’IS JÄYÄTZAME”**

**f LIVE**

**REVISTA MAL DE OJO**

**Coordinación de TRADICIONES Y CULTURA ZOQUE**

**ITAC**

**Tuxtla Es cultura!**

**Tuxtla Gutiérrez**

Selection © Paul Worley and Carolina Bloem

## MARY LEAUNA CHRISTENSEN

### Inborn

[Published in *Denver Quarterly*]

The language in me/ is old/ though I feel new to it/ my palate warping/ a metal over flame/ I practice the sounds of animals/ their names/ almost ancestral/ like they know I am trying/ yona (1) / the first word I ever knew/ bear/ some kind of witness/ to a sloppy rebirth/ I have told a lover/ I will name a child/ tsisdu (2) / because it is good/ to be quick & small/ & aware of your surroundings/ I will ink the animal's likeness/ on the inside of my wrist/ a reminder/ my body cannot be trusted/ to reproduce/ anything/ but words

(1) yo-na: bear [Cherokee, eastern dialect]

(2) g-stdu: rabbit [Cherokee, eastern dialect]

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### Bifurcation

[Published in *Puerto del Sol*]

I split/ my tongue/ down the middle/ not like a snake/ but like two rods divining/ taste top & bottom lip/ in unison/ find the water there/ the ore/ curse a lover/ & love him to death/ I want a little of everything/ heads & tails/ sides & sides/ of two languages/ my mother's tongue/ colonized/ & the tongue of her mother/ chased to mountain side & frozen stream/ really my tongue is the ouroboros/ marrying in a wet mouth/ trying to find some infinity/ where no words/ nestle under burial mounds

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## **In Which I Am a Sum of Parts**

[Published in *Southern Humanities Review*]

2 corn seed necklaces  
hang on the back of my door

along with 2 medicine bags  
made of tiny glass seed beads

sterling silver & turquoise  
bolo ties

(nothing crafted  
by my own hands)

\*

Another lesson

my ancestors hid in mountain  
caves & confederate uniforms

my many-greats grandfather  
was given the English name Nimrod  
b/c aren't we all mighty hunters

& it is likely my blood is altered  
or diluted somewhere in Oklahoma  
b/c not all ancestors were so lucky

(if that is the term we're using  
& the fact cannot be ignored—

I am diluted down to the card  
in my wallet which states  
my blood as a percentage)

\*

While I was cleaning  
my grandmother's house  
I found a box of tears

\*

I was barely a teenager  
the first time I remember  
visiting the reservation  
my grandmother left  
decades prior

her brother & brother's  
wife tried to educate me

commented on my lack—

how that was the first time  
I tried & gave up beading—

disillusioned when  
the belt I made broke

\*

My first lesson was corn seeds  
their grey hard form imperfectly round  
how they were solid manifestations  
of every Cherokee tear rained  
along the trail

\*

The scientific name for corn seed  
is many syllables but here  
we'll call it Cherokee Tear

it is easy to string onto necklaces  
but should not be confused  
with seed beads which come  
in varying degrees of tiny  
plastic & glass

\*

The last time I was on the rez  
it was not for an introduction  
but a burial

& I bought beads in colors  
I found comforting

along with needles

thin strips of leather

waxy manmade sinew

\*

Tears do not equate mourning  
but I take the pad of my finger  
press against a duct & hope  
to find some hard blockage  
induce a kind of birth

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WATCH HERE THE RECORDINGS OF THE GATHERING

↳ <https://www.facebook.com/100063902001001/videos/372144861412829/>

## KIMBERLY L. BECKER

### Helianthus

On my way to you  
I pass a field full of sun,  
gold on gold,  
and remember your saying  
you are descended  
from Mayans

Sun/sun dance

I grasp at happiness  
as if for bright coin  
from a well for wishing  
You tell me instead to hope  
and say to follow the sun  
like these flowers in lambent light

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### Heimweh

I am far from  
mound and mountain  
    On these Northern Plains  
the wind never ceases,  
susurrations like the ocean  
Astonishment at pelicans  
white, not the brown ones last seen  
    over Atlantic waves  
Dissonance of familiarity  
in strange place  
    Light insinuates late, aubades early  
*Wait til winter, you warn me*  
I learn new language  
for this landscape: coulee and kettles  
badlands buttes and bluffs  
    An eagle dives for prey

grander than ever imagined  
Bison trundle over earth  
A lone horse stands backlit on a rise  
My mouth tries to form the word  
for *horse* in your language: *xaawaarúxti'*  
    but I still face East to sing  
my morning song in Cherokee  
    On dusty road framed by primrose  
I find three yellow stones  
tiny jewels of sun I pass on to my son  
before his flight Northeast  
    Pelican in pond extends enormous wings  
as if to put on coat or cast off cape,  
or rather, as if measuring span  
between its existence and my insistence  
    on not entirely imagined kinship  
both of us between homes  
and on the way  
    to somewhere else

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## **Ventus**

This wind whittles down to essential form  
Riderless horses returned from Little Big Horn

Always we are pulled towards the idea of home  
Water and wind form cannonballs of stone

We trade words of greeting: NAheesa atistit/osd sunalei  
Wind loosens our hair, growing out after grief

Shame burns like flares on the Bakken  
Wind tosses flames like horses' manes

In Germany, sirocco from Spain a soft caress  
Distances deceive in this vast space

Palms almost touching, energy palpable  
To track Aurora, I download an app,

imagine us lying magnetized under neon skies  
You say the Missouri is called the Great Mystery

I introduce myself as I would to any person  
You point out strong current's direction

under what I perceived as only swirling surface  
We remember flooding of ancestral

homelands, dams built to harness force  
while river and wind keep adjusting course

## KARLA CORDERO

### ABUELA IS A MACHETE WRAPPED IN HER FAVORITE APRON

a man once slammed a fruit bowl against the kitchen wall & abuela learned how glass can give birth to small daggers. she replaced her husband for knives. holds a blade like a loaded gun. enjoys the chop of cilantro-bundles for caldo & people swear she got lawnmowers for fingers. in the backyard the trees shed fruit-baskets but abuela dislikes the rind. can scalp a pear's skin in seconds. clean. you can see the sugar bleed off the slice. each hand a steady butcher. never once nicked a thumb. & for thirty years pierced meat. sliced basil. stripped salmon of its glittered-gills. then dr. gonzalez found her memory had carved itself pieces. she was handed plastic flatware. all her metal went dull. the good utensils for steak hidden. the house keys now chained to her apron & sometimes her mouth switchblades when the keys go missing. today at the grocery store i tell her stories about the palms she owns. how they once tricked a carrot to dance like bright confetti & abuela picks a fresh pear. the heavy end cleansed by the fog of her breath. she swears she's always loved the fruit's pale flesh. & her teeth a wooden drawer of machetes.

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### ALLISON HEDGE COKE READS HER POETRY

### AT THE INTERNATIONAL POETRY FESTIVAL OF MEDELLIN, COLOMBIA

↳ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CufloPHP4o>

## ALLISON HEDGE COKE

### DRUNK BUTTERFLIES

Butterflies inebriated, sloshed  
spiraling upward from pools of water  
holding fermented foliage we  
passed by while canoeing on the Neuse.  
Orange, white, yellow, blue, black, brown  
speckled, swallow-tailed, patterned,  
mottled, webbed flash and quiver,  
fluttering fine, fly, pit painted lady mating ritual.  
Wrapping shyness with wing, undercover, under  
folding blanket over lover.  
Liquid courage emboldens beginnings, above  
happenstance provision, easy prey for  
prowling bird, turtle, fish, crawdad, frog.  
The beauty of it all  
in sunlightened wing shining, falling forward and  
back, up and down. Frenzy fantastic  
color gentle, feathered wing too delicate to touch  
without removing glide barb. Metamorphosed  
just for this day  
a metaphor, relational,  
for all that is good and will be.  
Butterfly girl wraps her hair into braided wing  
flaps for future. Turns herself  
into the softest touch, lifting and rising  
everything around her, all that is good—  
this is good—  
something they do so much  
better than Human Beings  
in natural accord with traditional way  
of the butterfly creation racing,  
occurring in this way, for her and for those following her.  
Kama, kamama. Catch her  
in the morning and  
again at night, at midday she just floats by breezing.

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## MEASURING UP

It wasn't socks missing from his feet,  
not elbow cloth unraveled unilaterally,  
not equal displacement of chin and brow,  
nor the eye that sat a bit lower on the right, it was his knuckle that  
made me weep,  
clove corners gone wayside, like miniscule meat hooks clawed away bits of him each  
shift he made, invisible a timeliness unfurled. It was his muscle torn through,  
festering, the prosthetic hand, finger width dismay all across his attempted grin, left  
there just like that, for anyone to see—it was his mercy. In the end we're rarely  
beautiful, mostly placed away from compromising situations into poses offsetting  
what has become of us in some gawker's unnerving eyes. Yet, he was, is, still here in  
mine, and I'm human because of it. Maybe only. Maybe.

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## PANDO/PANDO

*The Trembling Giant Aspen / Bolivian massacre site*

Trembling giant  
bulging under siege  
Pando  
/Pando

waving I spread  
banned from streets  
perpendicular to leaf blade  
Pando/  
Pando

havoc, natural gas  
petiole flattened  
opposition pushing right autonomy  
rush, lift, breaking cover, tremble  
on the fourth day of  
yellow-white-grayish-yellow  
Pando/Pando

hunger strike, assailants  
lobbed a green grenade  
forced to knees shirtless  
peasantry  
tree  
Pando  
/Pando  
Pando/  
Pando  
aspen man spreads uprising  
flowering, flower,  
spreading root sprout  
Pando  
ambush

where Morales has stayed  
biomass clone cross giant uprising deeply rooted Indigenous  
growth prevent Bolivia from splintering apart Pando/Pando

visiting Santa Cruz  
one hundred acres  
dynamite blasts  
fourteen million pounds  
public humiliation  
Pando/Pando

rooted eighty thousand years  
fifty Indigenous mayors rooted thirty Andeans killed this  
week paralyzed borders  
Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay  
Pando/Pando  
clonal colony  
colonial massacre  
singular genetic individual  
Morales, an Aymara Indian, Pando/Pando  
organized opposition, university student conservatives, forced  
terrified Indigenous people, to their knees forced refugee people  
to  
apologize for coming to Sucre forced chanted insults to their hero  
Evo then conservatives set fire  
to blue, black, white Aymara flag seized hand-woven Aymara  
ponchos Aymara people  
Pando/Pando

Pando/Pando  
rhizome, basal shoot  
shot, seven dead  
shooting—genet/ramet  
peasant farmers

organism overtaking  
not supported by current evidence

Fishlake quaking

Amazon

Pando

aspen life in largest

singular germination

Pando/Pando

Pando/Pando

Pando/Pando

Pando/Pando

Pando/Pando

Pando/Pando Pando/Pando

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## WE WERE IN A WORLD

We were in a world, in a world. Sure we had our glyphs, but we were providential. Once, some alphabet believers, glass purveyors, Ursus Arctos killers, sent all bailiwick on cursed course far faster gyration backspin, birling intrinsic angular momentum—boson melts. Spinning, it careened away iceberg, iceberg, ice berg; glacier braced time traced yesterday unshakable base—all below flushed alluvion torrent, Niagara pour, special spate, flux, flow, until their coastal citadels moldered from cyclone, tsunami, hurricane gale. Tornadoes tossed turf wherever they pleased. Eruptions molded Her back into something She deemed worthy. *Not to mention quakes*. And the people, the people, the People, pushed into cataclysm, a few generations from alphabet book imposed catechism, soon were calamity tragedy storm splinters, fragmented particles of real past, in a world gone away from oratory, song, oraliteratures, orations into gyrations reeling. Soon hot, hot, hot, hot, hot, hot, hot, hot, hot. Hot, dying mangroves, disappearing Waimea Bay, dengue fever, butterfly range shift, meadow gone forest, desert sprung savannah, caribou, black guillemots, bats, frogs, snails—gone. *What will sandhill cranes crave?* Winged lay early. Reefs bleach. Rain, rain, rain, rain, rain, rain, rain, snow, snow, snow, fires flaming fiercely, fascinated in their own reflecting glare. Marmots rise early. Mosquitoes endure longer, lasting biting spreading West Nile. Polar bears quit bearing. Robins, swallows, enter Inuit life. Thunder finds Inupiat. Here, it is said, glyphs left rock wall, stone plates, bark, branch, leapt animated into being, shook shoulders, straightened story, lifted world upon their wing bone, soared into Night, to place World back into socket eased sky—stilled us. Some say the soup leftover was worded with decolonized language. Some say the taste lingers even now.

## More about the poets in this selection

- MARY LEAUNA CHRISTENSEN: "[Cherokee writer selected for prestigious poet event](#)", Cherokee One Feather
- KIMBERLY L. BECKER: "[Six poems](#)", Siwar mayu
- KARLA CORDERO: <https://www.karlacordero.com>
- ALLISON HEDGE COKE: [Poetry Foundation](#)

## More about the translators



**Carolina Bloem** teaches Latin American Studies and Spanish at Salt Lake Community College. Her research focuses on present-day Wayuu orature and its impact both in local and international communities. Past research interests include travel writing in 19th-Century Colombia and Venezuela, and conduct manuals and their biopolitical role in society.



**Paul M. Worley** is Associate Professor of Global Literature at Western Carolina University. He is the author of *Telling and Being Told: Storytelling and Cultural Control in Contemporary Yucatec Maya Literatures* (2013; oral performances recorded as part of this book project are available at [tsikbalichmaya.org](http://tsikbalichmaya.org)), and with Rita M Palacios is co-author of *Unwriting Maya Literature: Ts'íib as Recorded Knowledge* (2019). He is a Fulbright Scholar, and 2018 winner of the Sturgis Leavitt Award from the Southeastern Council on Latin American Studies. In addition to his academic work, he has translated selected works by Indigenous authors such as Hubert Malina, Adriana López, and Ruperta Bautista, serves as editor-at-large for México for the journal of world literature in English translation, *Asymptote*, and as poetry editor for the *North Dakota Quarterly*.

