

## The Memory of Plants in Three Poems of Gloria Mendoza Borda



*Dulce naranja dulce luna* © Gloria Mendoza Borda

Introduction, selection and translation from Spanish © Andrea Echeverría

Gloria Mendoza Borda (1948) is a renowned Peruvian poet from Puno who currently resides in Arequipa. She joined the Carlos Oquendo de Amat Group in the 1960s and has published *Wilayar* (1971), *Los grillos tomaron tu cumbre* (1972), *Lugares que tus ojos ignoran* (1985), *El legendario lobo* (1997), *La danza de las balsas* (1998), *Dulce naranja dulce luna* (2001), *Mujer, mapa de música* (2004), *Q'antati deshojando margaritas* (2006), *Desde la montaña grito tu nombre* (2013), *Amtasiña* (2013), and *Mi abuela, mi patria* (2018). In the three poems below, included in *Dulce naranja dulce luna* (2001), Mendoza represents how plants communicate their memory. Three of them: the cherry tree, the avocado tree

and the honeysuckle. These texts provide an ecological vision based on Quechua-Aymara forms of knowledge that transcend the anthropocentric perspective. To initially approach these poems, perhaps the best thing to do is to ask yourself: what do these plants communicate? What vision do they convey about the passage of time? What forms part of their memory? I invite you to read these poems within the historical framework of the political violence that affected all of Peru, and especially provincial cities and rural communities in Peru during the *Conflicto Armado Interno* (1980-2000). As you will notice, these plants cry and suffer the passage of time, nostalgically remember the past, and communicate their experience about traumatic episodes that happened in this context.

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## **The Cries of the Cherry Tree**

I am the old cherry tree  
who saw them grow  
as artists  
I also knew how to be an artist  
I also knew how to be a river  
phosphorescent birds  
would stay in my currents  
they made nests with dazzling weeds  
and they sang to life

my roots  
keep moving forward  
through the underground

I cry in the name of mother earth  
in the skin of the boys  
suffering  
the desolation of the courtyard  
I cry  
on the posters  
that they hung  
on my mutilated arms  
“Protest against the Cherry Tree’s Death”  
I cry  
because I don’t know the reason  
why did they destroy my branches  
I cry  
in the name of the white doves

(those who came from the Plaza Mayor  
they will no longer be able to shelter from the sun  
under my shade)

I cry  
because the sound of the boys' pan flutes and guitars  
stayed in me  
they played in my lap  
during the sunsets

however  
I exist  
in our memory  
I exist

I am the invisible cherry tree  
that keeps them company

my fruits used to adorn  
girls' heads  
that took shelter  
in my skirts

why did the ax become enraged  
with my silence?

from my invisible image  
I predict life  
I light the fire  
my currents grow  
I also feel bird  
I also feel man

I also feel artist

I also feel river.

**Listen to Gloria Mendoza**  
**Reading her poetry in**  
**Spanish ↪ [HERE](#)**

## Looking for the Avocado's Path

In these times  
I did not bear fruit  
it's true  
but my leafy green inspired  
announced a time of hope

I tried to get closer to the sky  
I walked more than a hundred years  
downward  
towards the immensity  
I flourished on the cliffs of silence  
only the trace of my forms remained  
the semi-destroyed sculpture  
looking for my lost path  
and the dismayed look  
of my friends

I am the result  
of changes and death.

## **The Honeysuckle's Agony**

Mother and lady

centennial

I cry my green agony

drunken my flower

numbs

the morning

I scream

I implore

they don't listen to me

I sing in the language of the green

dry

and weak

my skin

in other times

my fruit was honey

as a child

the sculptor Jorge Mendoza

took one of my branches

and soon

ran with my scent

looking for his mother

I was born

before all of you

'the house of art'

came later

in my roots  
lives the story  
of men  
that passed through  
and left

I still exist  
a cable  
covers my fingers  
crosses my feet  
I hope the crows  
don't eat my leaves

in each contour  
of my path  
there is a wire  
at each knot  
I break and twist

I look at the blue sky  
the song of birds  
accompany my green symphony

wild dance  
my heart  
the wound  
it won't let me walk

a terrifying shadow  
covers my eyes



from the sun

A white dove  
drinks water  
in the pool  
in the well  
the mirror  
of my image  
the water  
doesn't reach  
my insides  
I'm hung  
from the throat  
imprisoned  
forgotten  
mutilated  
nightfalled  
hanged  
scrawny  
stretched  
withered  
disoriented  
scared  
threatened  
bitten

without truce  
oh perfection  
I cry my green  
from so much spiraling  
death stalks me

but does not find me

here I am friends

rooted

ancient

lonely

silent witness

youthful dreams

students go on strike

for struggles and triumphs

for permanent creation

for happiness

alone

I cry

my green agony

hungry

imprisoned

centennial.

## For more about Gloria Mendoza

- “[Gloria Mendoza Borda and David Robertson in conversation with Ingrid Bejerman](#)”, Hay Festival Arequipa 2021.

## About the translator



**Andrea Echeverría Langsdorf** is an Associate Professor at Wake Forest University. She earned her doctoral degree in Latin American Literature and Cultural Studies at Georgetown University. She is the author of *Yeyipun en la ciudad. Representación ritual y memoria en la poesía mapuche* (Editorial Universidad de Guadalajara, 2021) and *El despertar de los awquis: migración y utopía en la poesía de Boris Espezúa y Gloria Mendoza* (Paracaídas Editores & UNMSM, 2016), as well as of several academic articles published in journals such as *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, *Latin American Research Review* and the *Canadian Journal of Hispanic Studies*. She is currently working on a book that studies Mapuche visual art.