

Selected Poems from Telar Luminario/ Weaving Light by Ruperta Bautista Vázquez



THE POET

Ruperta Bautista Vázquez is a community educator, writer, anthropologist, translator, and Tsotsil Maya actress, from San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, México. She holds degrees in Creative Writing from the Sociedad General de Escritores de México (SOGEM), Indigenous Rights and Cultures from CIESAS-Sureste, Anthropology from Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas, and a Masters Degree in Education and Cultural Diversity. To date she has published *Xojobal Jalob te'* (Telar Luminario) Pluralia Ediciones y CONACULTA, México D.F, 2013; *Xchamel Ch'ul Balamil* (Eclipse en la madre tierra)

2008, Primera edición. 2014, 2da edición; *Ch'iel k'opojelal* (Vivencias) 2003; and had her work anthologized in *Palabra conjurada, cinco Voces cinco Cantos* (Coautora) 1999. Her work has been translated into English, French, Italian, Catalán, and Portuguese.



THE TRANSLATOR:

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), and with Rita M Palacios is co-author of the forthcoming *Unwriting Maya Literature: Ts'ib 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*.

INTRODUCTION:

This brief selection of poems comes from the latest published work of the Tsotil Maya poet Ruperta Bautista Vázquez, *Xjobal Jalob Te' / Telar luminario* (2013), 'Weaving Light.' It should be noted that it continues the trajectory established in her previous works, in which humanity must struggle day-in and day-out to survive in a world slowly succumbing to violence and despair. Situated within the context of Maya prophetic texts, *Xjobal Jalob Te'* intervenes within both the world of her world and our own. As suggested its name, the book is meant to be a "seeing instrument" in much the same way as the K'iche' Maya Popol wuj. This particular series of six poems, "Lightning," "Sustenance," "Ellipsis," "Sowing Hope," "Heirs to the Rain," and "Ancient Offering," emphasizes the relationships that people, and above all Maya communities, have with nature. In particular, they seek to revitalize traditional practices that have historically sustained human communities, and that remind us that our relationship with nature is reciprocal, that what we give eventually returns to us in some way. We hope that you enjoy these poems, and that shine a light in the contemporary world.

Paul Worley

TSELOV

Slok'tasba t'siletel te stumtunel yon'tonik,

snak'ojsbatal te unen nukulil.

Xtiltal te biktal unen ontanal.

Smes, stup' batel ' xchi'uk skevanel li xi'el me'nal ok'el ts'i'

te xnap'ap'et te yelov ak'ubale

Sjop te sk'ob li xonob k'anal

xchololet slo'il k'ok' te yee

chlo'ilajik xchi'uk sjamlejal osil.

Yalabsnich'nab tselov.

LIGHTNING

His heartbeats shed sparks

hidden underneath his young skin,

expanding outward from his tiny heart.

The brilliance wipes away clamoring howls

from the face of the night.

He takes the xonob k'anal in his hands¹

and speaks words of light,

speaking with the infinite.

He is heir to the lightning.

1. Xonob k'anal is not footnoted in the Spanish or Tsotsil. Literally it means, "Sandal Star."

KUXLEJAL

Ch-antalel slo'il jch'ulme'tik.
Xvuch'uch'et tal li syaxal ts'ib totil me'iletik
te o no'ox k'ejajtik komel te yut sbek' sat bolome.
Li stumtunel yo'tone s-va'an stek'anbe yip
yalab snich'nab k'ak'al.

Xul xt'ab tal te on'tonal,
xchi'uk yav yok skuxestal bel jol on'tonal,
yakbe yip li pat on'tonal ch'ayem
te sjelevel osil k'ak'ale.
Chanav te sp'ejlejel yut banamil te yu bu
chjelav slo'il poko' p'jil ants viniketik.
Stsatsubtasbe sbi poko' jteklumetik chapajemiktal
te vo'ne k'ak'al.

SUSTENANCE

The moonlight cultivates its language.

The elders' green letters resound,
hidden in the jaguar's eyes.

Its heartbeats support the children
of the sun in their rebellion.

Memory sows their footsteps,
their footsteps awaken memories,
they embrace a hope lost
in the fingerprints of time.

Memory flows through the veins of a world
where the elder's wise words are alive.

Memory fortifies the name of millenary peoples
built before history.

CH'INETEL

X-a'yaj ch-k'opoj li tonetike,
ch'anal xuxubajel x-a'yaj te sob ikliman.

Ch-och te sbek'sat me'on kerem,
skux yon'ton te sme'nal o'nton mol,
spukesba te ik' spomta umetel tse'oj.

Sk'upinbe sp'ijil sjol yon'ton li antsetik
altsajemik skoj li vokole.
Skusbe lok'el slabanel vi'nal
ibiltajem te yo'ton jteklumetik.

Stsatsubtasbe yutsil slikeb kuxlejal.
Sjalbe yip poko' p'ijilal k'ejajtik te sjalob te'
jalomajeletik jchapanej kuxlejal.

ELLIPSIS

You hear the rocks murmuring
silent syllables in the dawn's ears.

They penetrate the eyes of a young orphan,
rest in the prolonged sighs of an old man,
are diluted by the smile-perfumed air.

They caress the thoughts of women
seated beside their suffering.
They wash away the laughing hunger
rooted in our communities.

They crafts songs we've sung since the beginning of time.
They weave ancestral secrets
on the looms of the weavers, jchapanej kuxlejal.²

² Artisans of life.

JTS'UNULAJELTIK

Sna'el totil me'letik

te'o kuxul te sbel sjol yonton

jch'ieletik jk'oponej ya'lel vinajel.

K'alal yakil ch-antin li k'ak'ale

ochik yalel te yut o'

va sk'oponik muk'tik ch'enetik.

Xch'ayik ochel te sk'in me'jom ak'baletik,

chixtanik vits'vtis o'

te chak vinajel.

Xch'ambik smoton ch'ul o',

xnuxlajan te stsatsal yutsil kuxlejal.

Juno'ox spاسبك syaxal vinajel xchi'uk li nabe,

li oketike yakil xnuxlajan

te jayil o' sk'elubil sat k'ak'al.

Chanavik te sjits'etel ik',

s-anesiktal lekilal te yav sts'unub

poko' kuxlejal.

K'ejajtik te uch'al o'

li jchapanej lo'iletike.

Sts'ujlajan yutsil xjobal ts'ujel,

smaltaik xcholobil ts'unub te yu bu chlupintal

yibil antsviniketik ch'ulel ixim.

SOWING HOPE

The ancestors' effigies survive
in the memories of the young
who sow the rain.

With their wisdom
they visit the watery caves
of the bathing the sun.

They plunge into the mermaid's music,
playing with tiny drops
at the shores of heaven.

They receive the water's offering,
swimming in the orchestra of life.

The blue arms of sea and sky, extend
while turtles swim in the cosmic bowl,
the sun on their faces.

On the whistling wind
they move, awakening new dawns
in the fields of an ancient history.

The communion leaders
remain in the watery hyacinths.

Bright drops descend,
watering the furrows where
women and men of corn take root.

TS'UMBAL O'

Molme'eltik jtusanej lekilal
xchapbik sk'oplal sts'umbalik
ch'ayesbilik te yonton jkaxlantik.

Cha' sutik talel li jchi'eletik yich'objik xch'ulel yajval o'
sk'ejosbaik batel ono'ox te yutsil malob k'ak'ale .
Ants viniketik ch'ulel o'e stsatsubtas yibilik sts'umbalik.

Poko' yotolal k'ak'aletik k'ejel komel
te sp'ijil totil me'iletik.
Sbel sjol yo'ton ach' jch'ieletik
chak'ik te ilel li vokolil ch'ayesbil te o'tonale.

HEIRS TO THE RAIN

The elders who protector our dreams,
speak with the seeds of a memory
erased by the storms of conquest.

Having hidden on the horizon
the spirits of men of the hurricane return.
Women and men of the rain cultivate their descendents.

Our ancestor's wisdom
shelters the ancient calendar.
The minds of the young spark fire
as they water the heart of forgotten histories.

POKO' MOTONIL

Li unen olole
xch'am ch'ul poko' motonil,
k'elanbil yu'un sk'ob uk'um.

Ch'anal xliket te anil te stsatsal ya'al xchan joyel jme'tik u',
li sjol yon'tone stajintabe muel
te ik' xchajetel o'.

Xni'in batel sbe xch'ich'el te sp'ejlej syaxal
osil balamil spetojbe xch'iel balamiletik.
Sk'ian yibil kuxlejal te slikeb k'ak'aletik.

Xchi'uk sbatlajel sk'ejoj
slajesbe batel spukujil snak'oj
te sjol yo'tonik li jch'ieletik te balamile.

ANCIENT OFFERING

The newborn
drinks the ancient offering
from the river's hands.

The child runs silently in the four moons' flowing,
her thoughts playing with the water's music
that penetrates the air.

Her arteries expand,
her infinite blue body embracing the planets.
Her roots reach back to the beginning of time.

As the infinite song unfolds,
it drives out the demons
that trouble the human mind.