

## Manuel Tzoc Bucup's Queer Poetry



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**Introduction by Rita Palacios**  
**Poems translated from Spanish by Paul Worley**

**Manuel Tzoc Bucup** is a poet, visual, and performance artist from Iximulew (Guatemala). His work is intersectional, using poetic language and visual art to explore social realities, focusing on gender, identity, the body, origins, memory, language, image, object, sexual dissidence, and all possible combinations of these. He is self-taught, having learned through workshops, certificate programs, and readings of contemporary art and literature. In addition to self-published poetic objects, he has published a number of books in alternative presses, and his texts have appeared in literary magazines and anthologies throughout Abya Yala. Further, he has presented his visual art in galleries and contemporary art shows locally and internationally.



He is one of the founders of Maleta Ilegal, a cartonera editorial, that is a small, independent and handmade publishing outfit that carries out limited print runs. He is well-known for his queer, erotic poetry and his poetic book objects, and recently he spearheaded the publication of one of the first queer poetry collections in Central America, *Antología LGBTIQ+ Guatemala* (e/X 2018). Tzoc's overall approach to the edition and publication of his verses is informed by both the practical need to forego censorship and to ensure that his work is also experienced in a sensory manner. This also means that he shortens the distance between creator and public, lending his verses a physicality that they would otherwise lack as mere printed words. For the poet, the feel of the paper, the impact of the images, and the experience of handling the poetic object are all a part of the experience, and the reader is prompted to reflect on the fetishization of the book, and, ultimately, the word.



*Cuerpo de niño triste* © Manuel Tzoc Bucup, 2015

His latest collection, *Wuj* (December 2019), recreates an epistolary experience of sorts. The poet-maker crafts a mere fifty copies of a loose-leaf poetic object, made out of richly textured paper, with font resembling typewritten text, all enclosed in an envelope that has been sealed. To obtain a copy, one must contact Tzoc directly, and its delivery is done by an international courier (Guatemala has no national postal system) or in-person (it should be noted that getting hold of a copy of *Wuj* has been impacted by the current global pandemic). The verses therein reflect on our relationship to social media (“Adiós Facebook! Cierro mi cuenta contigo ☹️” *Goodbye Facebook! I’m closing my account with you ☹️*) and the internet (“San Google cómo se encuentra tu espíritu cyborg en este momento?” *Saint Google how is your cyborg spirit at this moment?*); to writing and being read (“Ejercicios de escritura” *Writing exercises*, “A los lectores” *To the readers*, and “Wuj”); to Maya dress (“Kat Waj” *I love you*); and to urban life (“Memoriales urbanos” *Urban memorials*), to name a few. For this edition of Siwar Mayu, Tzoc presents us with unpublished verses that reflect on the current global pandemic: what it means to be alone, to face fear, illness, and death.



*Polen* © Manuel Tzoc Bucup, 2014

**A selection of 5 poems from an unpublished collection tentatively entitled, "Strawberries and Failure" by Manuel Tzoc. Written during the COVID-19 global pandemic for the electronic magazine Siwar Mayu, Guatemala 2020.**

## **BULLSHIT OF OBLIVION**

Looking at the things in my bathroom  
I ask myself about the little bullshit in them  
those cynical bodies of the future  
washing themselves with unscented gel soap

Exactly boy  
we are bodies with no future  
THAT'S US  
washing and dirtying our hearts, wanting  
to write from the depths of the abyss

Rebuilding the crime of day-to-day life  
hugging our favorite book  
watering a red poppy  
looking out at the oil infested water  
hugging a dead body, still warm  
caressing stray dogs  
finally and at last  
this is the bullshit of our happy years

The day's crime section  
full of domestic and work incidents  
are we alone or do we feel alone?  
the truth is always singular  
I can't speak for you, girl  
I'm sorry  
even if you hate me  
I'll disappear any minute  
to rebuild the cursed history of our lives

## **STAR OF LONELINESS**

Right now  
you are the only thing that exists  
Star of Loneliness  
you'll keep us company  
these nights filled with guns fired into the air  
nights of collective isolation  
of bodies pursued and forgotten  
of radiant and free flamingos  
swimming in urban rivers

Nights of solitary mirrors  
OF ME AGAINST MYSELF

*Note: this was written on the first day of the stay at home order in Guatemala, the 22 of March 2020*

## CORN DOUGH

Chew on the memory  
devour  
the ear of corn toasted by the fire  
living ash

## WOUNDED GIRL

The world and its mundane dangers  
is outside, hypochondriac girl  
(it's even inside)  
waiting for you  
calling you  
you can't keep traveling through the universe  
on that treadmill  
germs smile back at you from everything  
you are terrified of opening the door to go out  
of touching your friends' skin  
of penetrating your lovers' flesh

The sharp corners of things threaten you  
you've made a cave in your wounded heart  
you fear the spores floating in front of your crazed eyes  
breathe and feel the pure, infected air  
breathe and feel and ask to be calmer

Walk and breathe deeply my hypochondriac friend  
and everything will be fine!  
Or maybe not

## SALT WATER

Everyone in this story will get hurt  
with a dead body in tow  
with a lover in the middle of the pandemic  
healed  
wounded  
the same  
private  
sick  
rejuvenated  
bored to death  
more alone than ever  
more connected than ever  
overworking ourselves virtually  
or eternally waiting, resume in hand, for a reply

This story  
this path  
destiny  
chance  
bad or good luck  
our daily walks on sidewalks of blood and green grass  
films of memories and things we've forgotten  
and salt water  
always SALT WATER  
anxiously awaiting  
our defeated bodies