

In Process

Thursday, October 2, 2025

National Hispanic Heritage Month Event with Adela Najarro

“Nothing happens in the ‘real world’ unless it first happens in the images in our heads.”—Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

From collision / and a struggle / to survive”—Adela Najarro, “An Ambiguity”

The year 2020 was our first official event in honor of National Hispanic Heritage Month. Since then, we’ve had five events, with seven authors visiting from around the country—Latine writers with roots in Mexico, Texas, California, Tennessee, Vermont, the Bronx, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Puerto Rico. This afternoon is our sixth event, we are continuing the story of these events, and we are very blessed to hear Adela Najarro read today and contribute to that story.

Adela is the author of five poetry collections: *Split Geography*, *Twice Told Over*, *My Childrens*, a chapbook that includes teaching resources, *Volcanic Interruptions*, a chapbook that includes Janet Trenchard’s artwork, and this year her *Variations in Blue* was published by The Letras Latinas / Red Hen Collaborative. She holds a doctorate in literature and creative writing from Western Michigan University, as well as an M.F.A. from Vermont College. The 2024 Int’l Latino Book Awards designated *Volcanic Interruptions* as an Honorable Mention in the Juan Felipe Herrera Best Poetry Book Award category. Adela has been recognized by The California Arts Council as an established artist for the Central California Region and they appointed her as an

Individual Artist Fellow. Her extended family left Nicaragua and arrived in San Francisco in the 1940's. The last of her family settled in Los Angeles, following the fall of the Somoza regime. Adela is a poet with a social conscious, she serves on the board of directors for Círculo de poetas and Writers, while also working with the Latinx community nationwide, promoting the intersection of creative writing and social justice. After some 20 years of university teaching, Adela now writes full time, and she's currently working on a novel and writing a new book of poems.

Adela's *Variations in Blue: Poems* is shaped by rich historical, cultural, familial, and linguistic sources, and they are remarkable poems because of their yearning, vulnerability, and artistry. In her poems, Adela gathers her reader in a sensual banquet of colors, images, fruits and smells, homes and foods, the vastness of the desert, the fire and smoke of volcanos, scattered bones, a stone floor, the brightness of a single flower, the heights of a mountain. Girlhoods and womanhood's fighting for change, and continuity. She composes poems that celebrate Latine identities, stories, and memoirs in motion or in process, sometimes broken, shattered, yet often pieced together and healed, in beautiful and evocative language that sings.

If no longer bent,
but still cracked open with hip bones
shattered into a tableau of what should

never happen—then knit.
Knit bones. Knit together shards
and pieces until the pelvic girdle

is one piece. Whole.
This will require knitting needles heated
on the sun's corona and wool woven

from your mother's womb. (from "Inherit the Wind," 48)

Adela writes poems and canciones, myths, compressed histories, and stories.

They are songs celebrating nature, the earth, artistic, familial, and even spiritual journeys, in which we experience a quest to meld together a collective existence—indigenous, modern, mestizo—between Nicaragua and the United States, between self and other, as the life of poetry sets in motion new possibilities of existence. Poems discovering a journey through linguistic and cultural migrations, mixing, and translations. "Nature on fire. Poetry / a living thing," she writes in "Volcano Poetics."

Adela's poems are alive, elemental, and they set us on fire, burn down the foundations of our being, to help us experience what it's like to be alive. And to strive to live with dignity and hope, no matter how devastating the presence of change and loss. As I suggested to my The Experience of Literature class this week, sometimes others just need us to be open to their story, and that might mean all we have to do is listen, listen closely and with generosity, so sometimes that story turns to a song that needed singing, music we need to hear. That's often at the center of Adela's poems, and a great part of the beautiful power of her verse is a lyricism that makes our eyes, minds, and hearts perceive miniature glimmerings into deeper emotions, perceptions, and music. What Adela names "Idiomas Desconocidos," unknown (perhaps unheard

or unnoticed) languages. “And still what captures most are leaves lifting / as winds
sopla en idiomas desconocidos” (22). And in “To Inherit the Earth”:

pull yourself up so you can
at least sit. For a moment. On the front stoop.
Quit smoking and watch a stranger
walk by. Notice the possum asleep

on a gate, the squirrel beginning
to laugh, a piece of broken glass
on the sidewalk caught in midday rays.

Look up,
see leaves on a tree silently
green. (48-49)

In that same poem, Adela writes of a body, a person, whose bones

cannot carry
the weight of days and nights
bitterly cold
when mylar blankets were not enough. (48)

I experience such a great wonder and mastery in that vivid image and detail, that
miniature glimmering of the *mylar blanket*. So thin, so manufactured, synthetic,
unhuman. Available for as low as \$3.99 at any hardware store. For the price of a
grande drink at a local coffee shop, anyone can purchase an “emergency blanket.” Yet
in the poem these blankets “were not enough” against the “bitter cold.” And I hope
that early this morning, after *the weight of days and nights*, a person walking in a desert
with a great amount of desperation and hope and vitality did not die in the cold. Or
I’m unable to forget the chain-link enclosure images of detention centers in Texas, the

people lying on the concrete floor under mylar blankets that should not be forgotten.

The wonder of that image and detail. *Nature on fire. Poetry / a living thing.*

Adela's gift is in helping us to imagine the earth we want to inherit.

There is much much more I can say about Adela's fantastic poetry and in welcoming her to this event. I'd say most certainly that when I read *Variations in Blue*, I was astonished poem after poem, in awe of how she structured the book, and how much diverse and engrossing images, details, and experience she forms with brevity, compression, and attention in her poems. Or I must say that Adela's poetry compels me to be a better person and a better writer.

I recently read a sentence by the Presbyterian reverend John Norman Maclean, the father of the writer Normal Maclean. He wrote, "One of the chief privileges of man is to speak up for the universe." If you are a writer, you understand that he's suggesting that we each have the right to write about anything. Our voices matter in the universe. He's also suggesting something about imaginative empathy and freedom. I would add that Maclean is suggesting that we must gather the *courage* to write about what matters to us. Today, I revise his words to express that *Adela Najarro is a woman, una poeta, who has the courage to speak up for the universe.*

Please help me in welcoming Adela Najarro.