



# Latin American Literary Review

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## ARTICLES

Torres-Rodríguez, Laura J. "El género de la burocracia: <i>El libro vacío</i> de Josefina Vicens" .....	2
Andúgar, Rafael. "El retorno del desierto y los espectros del Antropoceno en <i>Blanco Nocturno</i> de Ricardo Piglia" .....	12
Eslava-Bejarano, Santiago. "Of Cattle and Men: Interspecies Encounters in Ana Paula Maia's <i>De Gados e Homens</i> " .....	20
Ordóñez Robles, Samanta. "La cara oculta de las masculinidades nuevas en el cine mexicano comercial" .....	32
Avila Ponce de León, Eric Miguel. "La vida es pornografía igualitaria. <i>Inmaculada o los placeres de la inocencia</i> de Juan García Ponce" .....	41
Veloria, Elyse. "On the Other Shore: Water in Latin American Illness Narratives" .....	53

## ESSAYS AND INTERVENTIONS

Campanioni, Chris. "Simulation Game: The Pleasures of Disintegration in Sarduy's Theater of Bodies" .....	62
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## CREATIVE WRITING

Ross Laguna, Jen. "Macho Mama" .....	70
Spooner, T. M. "The Coquí Call" .....	75
Romero, Galo. "Maria" .....	78
Ronderos, Clara Eugenia. "Cuando las montañas son paisaje, y otros poemas" .....	79
Zak, Leila. "Tierra y mar" .....	82

## BOOK REVIEWS

<i>Escrituras geológicas</i> , de Cristina Rivera Garza. Madrid: Vervuert, 2022. 205 páginas. Reviewed by Caro Register .....	84
<i>Revolutionary Visions: Jewish Life and Politics in Latin American Film</i> , by Stephanie Pridgeon. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021. 194 pages. Reviewed by Claire Solomon .....	86
<i>Asaltos al escenario: humor, género e historia en el teatro de Sabina Berman</i> , de Priscilla Meléndez. Mexico City: Bonilla Artigas Editores, 2021. 384 páginas. Reviewed by Stuart A. Day .....	88
<i>The Business of Conquest. Empire, Love, and Law in the Atlantic World</i> , by Nicole D. Legnani. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020. 282 pages. Reviewed by Christian Elguera.....	89

## BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

Shiffman 109, MS 024

Waltham, MA 02453

Email: [lalr.editors@gmail.com](mailto:lalr.editors@gmail.com)

Website: [www.lalrp.net](http://www.lalrp.net)

## Maria

Galo Romero

Born and raised in Queens, New York, Galo Romero is a first generation American of Ecuadorian descent. His creative writing mixes the fantastic, bizarre, macabre, and mundane, with reflections of his Ecuadorian-American upbringing.

Maria peered through the chain-link fence wondering when the teenage girls playing tennis would invite her. Her innocent and naive mind couldn't comprehend nor appreciate the difference between her kind and the privileged. They seemed carefree and oblivious of any worldly concerns and heeded no mind of Maria's doll-like stare, laughing and giggling as they volleyed. In the intense summer heat, they remained pristine: clean and pure like wingless angels on holiday, a stark contrast to the sweat and dirt which caked on Maria's cheeks and fingernails. With her tiny delicate hands and splayed fingers, Maria shook the fencing, hoping to get their attention, hoping they'd let her play, but the girls never noticed; Maria was invisible, a shadow in sunlight.

Maria stood resolute and watched with continued envy, silently ignoring the hunger pangs stabbing at her stomach until her mother grabbed her by the crook of her arm and pulled her away. She cried like any denied child would cry, but her mother was solemn and stoic, seemingly indifferent and defiant to Maria's tantrum knowing there remained no easy solution to their plight. Scolding her daughter in public would do no one any good, so she towed her away.

Mother and daughter made their way out of the manicured landscapes of the Auburn Hills Country Club towards the main road leading back into the highway. Maria sensed the mood had become somber; it was overcast with an invisible pall which hung over their heads. There were no jobs available at the club, at least not today during a recession, especially for a person like Maria's mother who spoke little English and had no work papers. But things in America had also radically changed: illegals were no longer welcomed as they had once been and now faced resistance from the racist fervor and rhetoric of anti-immigrant politics.

It was a three-mile trek to the trough-shaped underpass which they currently called home. Maria's tears had finally settled and dried as they hobbled and climbed up the weedy slope of an embankment where they had hidden their possessions in overgrown shrubs and bushes. Silent and dutiful they each took turns and dragged their things into the protective shade of the roadway bridge. Maria, dehydrated and exhausted, lay next to her mother on flattened cardboard boxes that acted like improvised beds.

As night fell the incessant rattle of passing cars soon gave way to a deep sleep. In Maria's dreams the Mexico she knew was a far-away place, and Guatemala, the land of her birth, even farther still but nonetheless vivid in the enveloping mists of her memories. Her mother stood younger, beautiful, healthy, and carefree on a tropical beach. She playfully teased a drunken fisherman, who bore a broom mustache and may have been Maria's father. Intoxicated by the sea air, under the influence of a liberating rapture, the trio gamboled. Their bare feet kicked up white sands and their jubilant bodies splashed in the translucent waters of the Pacific Ocean... until the mists evaporated and receded into nothingness.

At the break of dawn Maria shook her mother. Her empty stomach growled and rumbled. Sharp hunger pangs once again made themselves known. The mother finally stirred and sat-up but reflected an emptiness Maria had never seen before. The fraught woman rose zombie-like and shambled towards the open road, a lost silhouette against a watercolor sky of indigo and traces of orange and red. Concerned, Maria followed closely in her wake.

The penurious pair reached the gray asphalt highway and walked towards oncoming traffic. Headlights glowed in the distance. Maria took her mother's hand. A single tear broke free. She closed her coffee-brown eyes and concentrated on the sweet angelic faces of the tennis players.