



## Latin American Literary Review

VOLUME 51 / NUMBER 102 SPRING 2024

### ARTICLES

- Wilson, Mac J. The Mesh and the Abyss: Juan L. Ortiz's Ecopoetics ..... 2
- Estrada Orozco, Luis Miguel. Escritura documental, zozobra e intersubjetividades en *Había mucha neblina o humo o no sé qué*, de Cristina Rivera Garza ..... 13
- Gitlin, Daniella. The Mechanics of Uncertainty in Rodolfo Walsh's *Operación Masacre* ..... 24
- Cupic, Tijana. Las soberanías yuxtapuestas: los piratas y los narcotraficantes en la literatura latinoamericana y su relación con el estado ..... 38

### DOSSIER: Words and Rhythm, Sound and Text. Charlie D. Hankin, editor.

- Hankin, Charlie D. Introduction to Words and Rhythm, Sound and Text ..... 48
- Campbell, Corinna. Moving Beyond Words: Awasa and Apinti in a Suriname Maroon Communicative Matrix ..... 51
- Carter, Sam. Making Sense of a Corpus: Berta Singerman, Rhythm, and Recitation ..... 64
- Fleites Lear, Marena. Estranged Intimacies: An Anticolonial Poetics of Silence in the Poetry of Raquel Salas Rivera and Ana-Maurine Lara ..... 76
- Kassavin, Jane. Underwritten Voices: Resonant Spaces and Unsound Silences in Dani Zelko, Soraya Maicoño, and Daniela Catrileo ..... 86
- Plevka-Jones, Helen. Resonantly Reading Borderlands Narratives in Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive* ..... 100
- Vergara C., Isabella. Archivos vivientes: vistas, sonidos y cantos en *Border cantos* de Guillermo Galindo y Richard Misrach ..... 109
- Milone, Gabriela. Ficciones fónicas. Insistencias en la materia de la voz ..... 123
- Díaz Frene, Jaddiel. The Two Voices of Porfirio Díaz: State, Audible Fictions, and a Letter to Edison (Mexico-United States, 1907-1910) ..... 135
- Piazza, Sarah Maria. El poder de la voz y del acto de narrar en *La amante de Gardel* de Mayra Santos-Febres ..... 148
- Velarde, Malena. Escucha hospitalaria en el arroyo entubado Medrano en Buenos Aires ..... 159

### TRANSLATIONS

- "Lolo," a short story by Luis Arriola Ayala. Translated from Spanish by Megan Saltzman. .... 169
- The "Primitive" Cecilia Valdés. A short story by Cirilio Villaverde  
A translation and introduction by Thomas Genova. .... 172

### BOOK REVIEWS

- REVIEW ARTICLE. Más allá de la voz. Texturas (ultra)sonicas del poder, la resistencia y el deseo  
*Portable Postsocialisms: New Cuban Mediascapes after the End of History*. By Paloma Duong.  
*Transatlantic Radio Dramas: Antônio Callado and the BBC Latin American Service during and after World War II*.  
By Daniel Mandur Thomaz  
*Playlist: Música y sexualidad*. Por Esteban Buch.  
Reseñados por Ricardo Andrade Fernández ..... 186
- Espejismos reales Imágenes y política en la literatura rioplatense*.  
Por Diego Alonso  
Reseñado por Rodrigo del Río ..... 190
- Unexpected Routes: Refugee Writers in Mexico*.  
By Tabea Alexa Linhard  
Reviewed by Mauro Lazarovich ..... 192
- Holocaust Consciousness and Cold War Violence in Latin America*.  
By Estelle Tarica  
Reviewed by Marilyn Miller ..... 194
- Un presente abierto las 24h. (Escrituras de este siglo desde Latinoamérica)*.  
Por Mónica Velásquez Guzmán  
Reseñado por Emanuela Jossa ..... 196
- El retorno del monstruo. Figuras de lo monstruoso en la literatura latinoamericana contemporánea*.  
Por Adriana López-Labourdette  
Reviewed by Manuela Crivelli ..... 198

#### 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)

## TRANSLATION

### "Lolo," a short story by Luis Arriola Ayala. Translated from Spanish by Megan Saltzman

Luis Arriola Ayala  
luisarriola30@gmail.com

Megan Saltzman  
msaltzma@mtholyoke.edu  
ORCID: 0009-0001-6941-0046

**INTRODUCTION:** "Lolo" is one of the eight stories from the book *Otosan* (2015). Written by Peruvian journalist Luis Arriola Ayala, this book gives visibility to postcolonial, transnational migrant experiences. "Lolo" tells the story of an encounter between two undocumented workers, a young Peruvian and an old Filipino, in a garbage incineration plant in Tokyo. Despite the alienating situation and not being able to speak the same language, the two manage to find temporary companionship and ways to resist. This short story is based on the author's personal experiences working in Japanese factories.

**KEYWORDS:** Tokyo, Japan, Peru, Philippines, trash, recycling, material, postcolonialism, immigration, solidarity

The old Filipino looked like one more cog in the ovens of the garbage incineration plant. He never slowed down production. He was the first worker to arrive and the last to leave. He was always staying overtime looking for what could still be recycled. With a very thin body and bony arms, he carried the heavy, foul-smelling bags, keeping balance on his feeble legs. Due to the extreme heat, in the furrows of his face beads of sweat accumulated.

Although we were the only foreign workers, we hardly talked during breaks. I had tried countless times with simple questions in Japanese, in English; and he, just in time, would tilt his head to affirm or deny with a smile. I thought it was rude of him and I was bothered by his wry little smile, but later I realized that maybe the old man thought I had been hired to take his job.

Our job was to separate the garbage from the *gaijin*<sup>1</sup> who lived in Tokyo. Although the Japanese are very organized and separate their day-to-day waste into combustible and non-combustible, most foreigners always get confused and put both in black bags, which were not allowed by the Japanese municipalities. So, when the truck collector would bring them, the boss would yell out for us because the rest of the workers refused to open them because of their stench.

Tokyo garbage bags are transparent. On their exterior, in harmonious calligraphy, the Japanese write what each bag contains. Depending on the day, they arrive with stacks of newspapers, magazines and folded cardboard boxes; or with plastic and glass bottles

washed and without labels; or with clean and folded used clothes; or batteries, nails, scissors of various sizes; or CDs and plastics; or appliances that can still be used.

One day I had to separate the Japanese's garbage. I was surprised, their garbage didn't smell so bad. It was like being on vacation because the real work was the fearsome dark bags. What was kept inside of those was a mystery. From their penetrating odor, I guessed it was a mixture of smelly food remains, rotting vegetables, used toilet paper, sharp opened cans, putrid leftover fish, among other things.

In order to not get sick, we used rubber boots with steel toes, plastic aprons and gloves, and also masks. Despite this protection, a slight distraction while handling a garbage bag left a deep cut on my right hand. Within seconds, blood began to spurt. Frightened, I took off my gloves. I pretended nothing was wrong because the grouchy Japanese boss could fire me, and if that happened, I would have no place to sleep.

As if some mischief had been done, the old Filipino took my arm and forcefully pulled me to the bathroom. He took off his gloves and let the warm water run from the faucet and washed my hand with soap. Then, from his trouser pocket, he took out a cloth bag that concealed a small bottle, opened the lid and poured the colorless liquid on my hand. The wound caught fire from the burning.

"Sake is good," he said when he saw my gestures of pain.

While he blew on the wound, he capped the bottle and from

another pocket he pulled out several crumpled sheets. He chose the biggest ones and placed them on the wound. Then, he began to pray in a very low voice. At one point I seemed to hear an Our Father that sounded like Spanish. Within a few minutes, the bleeding stopped and out of curiosity I asked him if he spoke Spanish.

"I speak Chabacano<sup>2</sup>," he replied. "The Philippines was Spanish."

"Just like Peru," I replied.

We left the bathroom. I tried to put on the gloves but the old man ordered me to rest inside the warehouse. He would separate the garbage without the grumpy boss noticing. I thanked him and I promised to return the favor.

During the first month of work, I discovered one of the two reasons the old man was eating alone in the patio: it was impossible to get the stench off his body. I did the same. I decided to not enter the factory's cafeteria so as not to disturb the rest of the workers at lunch. The Filipino did not mind me eating with him and, sometimes, he had me taste what he had prepared. As days passed, I realized that many foods resembled foods from Peru, both in name and taste. He called the *estofado*, *estopado* and *sopas*, *sopas*.<sup>3</sup>

Only one dish from the Philippines did not whet my appetite, and to be more precise, it took it away. The smell of the balut was as nauseating as foreigners' garbage bags. The worst thing was watching him eat the egg with the duckling, savoring with pleasure. Seeing me with a disgusted face, the old Filipino man revealed that every morning he ate one for energy. And, oh, did he have it. How long has he been living in Japan, I wondered. I got up my courage to ask. Fifteen years, he specified. I have never been back to the Philippines, he said.

"I've been here two years and I plan to stay several more. I don't have much money saved because I'm illegal," I said.

The Filipino put down the empty bottle. He advised me that if I wanted to stay on these islands without fearing the *migra*, I had chosen the best place. That the two months I had been working at the plant would increase before I knew it. And as evidence, he had been there fifteen years: no Migration agent had ever peeked into the plant because of the stench.

"What job did you have in the Philippines?"

The old man told me that, very close to his house in Zamboanga, the train passed every day at the same time, and he made use of the railway lines to move people from one district to another on a rolling platform that a railway friend had lent him. That was the only way to feed his seven children and fifteen grandchildren.

"How do you say grandfather in Filipino?"

"Lolo" he answered, and from that moment that's what I began to call him.

Lolo did not mind living with swarms of flies because he was an expert with the black bags: he walked without fear among the pestilential ruins. So I wouldn't have more accidents, he opened mine and I put my hands in carefully.

"Thank you, Lolo," I told him.

The heat of the great ovens added to Tokyo's summer. The surly

Japanese boss put dishes of salt on top of water spouts so that the high temperatures wouldn't dehydrate the workers. The only one who did not consume it was Lolo. He preferred to drink sake. He went from a small bottle to three a day. Although he worked drunk, you couldn't tell because the mask he wore covered his breath. In addition, the smell of alcohol was lost in the midst of so much stench. That was the second reason why he liked to be alone at lunchtime: he drank the rice drink as if it were soda.

According to Lolo, the sake helped him deal with what was hiding in the foreigners' bags. But it got to a point that worried me: now he came to work drunk and at 10 a.m., on the first break of the morning, he drank more. At lunch he was still drunk. And in the afternoons, at just the right time, he couldn't stand up. Still in that state, he continued working and pointed out to me which bags weren't dangerous. Lolo never made a mistake... Out of curiosity I asked him what was his trick.

"The miracle speaks, but the *sant* does not lie," he said in Chabacano and laughed.

One morning he arrived late and sober to the plant. I thought the boss would scold him, but he didn't reproach him for anything. Lolo put on his uniform, opened a dark bag and ran to the bathroom. I thought he had cut himself. I looked inside the trash. There was no can or knife. In order to return the favor to him I went in. Lolo was in the urinal; each small stream of urine came out very slowly and was followed by groans of pain. He was sweating like it was noon.

He was exhausted. He took out a small bottle of sake from his pocket and drank it. Only then did he begin to feel better. At lunchtime he was quiet. He ate fast, drank more sake, and preferred to sleep during the last minutes of break. That afternoon his work rate slowed down and the next day the unimaginable happened: the best worker missed two weeks. In his absence, a Japanese man replaced him. That's how I found out that Lolo was recovering in a hospital. On his return, he was no longer the same. His body was much thinner. And Lolo didn't do anything to regain weight.

"Do you have food?" I asked him in the few words I had learned in his language.

"There's no food," he answered and took out the sake.

One afternoon the Japanese boss, seeing that Lolo was working very slowly, yelled mercilessly. Lolo didn't respond. He continued his rhythm. However, hours later, when he found him drinking sake in the factory courtyard, the grumpy boss insulted him. The screams paralyzed the plant. This time, there is always a first time, Lolo didn't hold himself back. He answered with a louder voice and jumped on top of him. The boss was scared, stunned to see such aggression. He called out for help but none of his compatriots came out to defend him. He had no choice but to run to his office, and he didn't come back out to the courtyard.

We stopped working. We sat on the floor and Lolo handed over a Philippine banknote. I looked at it carefully: twenty pesos, orange color and in the middle a man with a tie, wide forehead, and a serene look. Lolo told me about Manuel Quezón, the second president of his

country, who never allowed himself to be defeated by the Japanese in World War II.

"You are also a hero, *Lolo*," I told him.

He smiled. In that moment his mind was in the Philippines. I needed to distract him. I was afraid *Lolo* would kill the boss, but he didn't. He continued to drink sake and finished his shift. He punched out, said goodbye to all the workers and went out to the street to keep drinking.

The next day, at noon, the truck full of foreign garbage arrived. *Lolo* left the storage room to tell the driver where to leave it. Usually, it would take about ten minutes, but he came back early. Very calm, he told me that the boss was out there with four policemen and he added that it was time to see his family. I looked at him scared. There was nowhere to run. I reacted to his proposal: I had to hide under the combustible garbage. I obeyed and he quickly covered me with

more dark bags. In seconds, he formed a nauseating mound on top of me. A sticky putrid liquid was dripping down my face. I stopped complaining when I heard the Japanese boss ask him where I was. The old man replied that he didn't know. I sharpened my ear: an unknown voice ordered *Lolo* to lift several bags. The old man began to lift them, ripping open the bags and throwing trash on the ground. The same voice demanded that he raise the mound of bags.

*Lolo* complied. He quickly tore open each bag he removed, and the stench spread. The summer heat fermented the smell of rotten chicken guts. I bit my lips. I started to tremble. Through a few bags I was able to watch them. About to vomit, I saw two policemen doubled over holding their stomachs. The grumpy boss ordered *Lolo* to stop. The old man obeyed and walked toward him. They handcuffed him and I heard *Lolo's* voice fade away, praying in Chabacano. I waited till sundown, I left the plant smelling like shit, but free.

---

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Gaijin* is the informal Japanese term for foreigner(s). The term is sometimes used pejoratively.

<sup>2</sup> Spanish creole spoken in the Philippines.

<sup>3</sup> These are the original terms in Spanish and Chabacano. *Estofado/estopado* is stew and *sopa* is soup.