1. *Why Am I So Brown?*

By Trinidad Sánchez Jr.

A question Chicanitas sometimes ask
while others wonder: Why is the sky blue
or the grass so green?

Why am I so Brown?

*God made you brown, mi'ja*
color bronce—color of your raza
connecting you to your raíces,
your story/historia
as you begin moving towards your future.

*God made you brown, mi'ja*
color bronce, beautiful/strong,
reminding you of the goodness
de tu mama, de tus abuelas
y tus antepasados.

*God made you brown, mi'ja*
to wear as a crown for you are royalty—
a princess, la raza nueva,
the people of the sun.

*It is the color of Chicana women—*
leaders/madres of Chicano warriors
luchando por la paz y la dignidad
de la justicia de la nación, Aztlán!

*God wants you to understand...brown*
*is not a color... it is:*
a state of being a very human texture
alive and full of song, celebrating—
dancing to the new world
which is for everyone...

Finally, mi'ja
*God made you brown*
because it is one of HER favorite colors!

2. *Love Poem for My People*

By Pedro Pietri

do not let
artificial lamps
make strange shadows
out of you
do not dream
if you want your dreams
to come true
you knew how to sing
before you was issued a birth certificate
turn off the stereo
this country gave you
it is out of order
your breath
is your promiseland
if you want
to feel very rich
look at your hands
that is where
the definition of magic
is located at
3. Where You From?
By Gina Valdés

Soy de aquí
y soy de allá
from here
born in L.A.
del otro lado
y de éste
crecí en L.A.
y en Ensenada
my mouth
still tastes
of naranjas
con chile
soy del sur
y del norte
crecí zurda
y norteada
cruzando fron
teras crossing
San Andreas
tartamuda
y mareada
where you from?
soy de aquí
y soy de allá
I didn’t build
this border
that halts me
the word fron
tera splits
on my tongue

4. Learning English
By Luis Alberto Ambroggio
(translated from Spanish by Lori Carlson)

Life
to understand me
you have to know Spanish
feel it in the blood of your soul.

If I speak another language
and use different words
for feelings that will always stay the same
I don’t know
if I’ll continue being
the same person.

5. My Memories of the Nicaraguan Revolution
By Eugenio Alberto Cano Correa

A tear streaming from my eye,
Running through a field seeking refuge,
A road lined with bullet shells instead of pebbles,
An empty wheelbarrow stained red,
A pillar of smoke uniting sky and ground,
A slogan cried from the background,
A hug of protection from my mamá.
We would like you to know
we are not all
docile
nor revolutionaries
but we are all survivors.
We do not all carry
zip guns, hot pistols,
steal cars.
We do know how
to defend ourselves.

We do not all have slicked-back hair
distasteful apparel
unpolished shoes
although the economy
doesn't allow everyone
a Macy's charge card.

We do not all pick
lettuce, run
assembly lines, clean
restaurant tables, even
if someone has to do it.

We do not all sneak
under barbed wire or
wade the Rio Grande.
These are the facts.

We would like you to know
we are not all brown.
Genetic history has made
some of us blue eyed as any
German immigrant
and as black as a descendant
of an African slave.
We never claimed to be
a homogenous race.

We are not all victims,
all loyal to one cause,
all perfect; it is a
psychological dilemma
no one has resolved.

We would like to give
a thousand excuses
as to why we all find
ourselves in a predicament
residents of a controversial
power
how we were all caught
with our pants down
and how petroleum was going
to change all that but
you've heard it all before and
with a wink and a snicker
left us babbling amongst
ourselves.

We would like you to know
guilt or apologetic gestures
won't revive the dead
redistribute the land
or natural resources.
We are left
with one final resolution
in our own predestined way,
we are going forward.
There is no going back.

7. The Monster
By Luis J. Rodríguez

It erupted into our lives:
Two guys in jeans shoved it
through the door—
heaving & grunting & biting lower lips.

A large industrial sewing machine.
We called it “the monster.”

It came on a winter’s day,
rented out of Mother’s pay.
Once in the living room
the walls seemed to cave in around it.

Black footsteps to our door
brought heaps of cloth for Mama to sew.
Noises of war burst out of the living room.
Rafters rattled. Floors farted.
The radio going into static
each time the needle ripped into fabric.

Many nights I’d get up from bed,
wander squint-eyed down a hallway
and peer through a dust-covered blanket
to where Mama and the monster
did nightly battle.

I could see Mama through the yellow haze
of a single lightbulb.
She, slouched over the machine.
Her eyes almost closed.
Her hair in disheveled braids;
each stitch binding her life
to scraps of cloth.