

From Lorna Dee Cervantes Interview With Celeste Guzman

3. What makes a strong poem?

To quote myself in an old editorial statement: Strong poetry is "rooted in the earth and rendered in blood." No matter, ni modo, the style or taste of that particular moment -- as the strong poem *is* the particular moment, made over, and executed on the page.

4. What is the role of poetry?

French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard in his ground-breaking, paradigm shifting book, *The Poetics of Space*, was recorded as saying that "Poetry is the soul inaugurating a form." I'll go with that. What do I know? For me, poetry is the original all-purpose tool. It's all a matter of strategy and the play (or melodrama) of desire. Nezahualcoatl's question: "What do you want to leave behind?" Poetry can model some answers to that question. Poetry can be a kind of blueprint. A solution. As well as, the blues.

5. What are your hopes for poetry in the 21st century?

There's an old torch song, one of my favorite genres, that goes: "It's not for me to say." What are one's hopes for any relationship? Any marriage that vows, in the words of Rilke, to honor, protect, and hold one's self the "guardian" of the other's solitude?

I would hope that it would be written and spoken.

I would hope that it will be recognized as value, and a value-giving method of production -- and valued as the rare and valuable process that it is. Rare, not in the elitist sense or the collector's mentality of inventory, but in the face of the fact that any activity which allows you the leisure and pleasure to take total control over any process from beginning, middle to end is a rarity in this day and age when we are stuck making parts of things; we serve on the side in a side role, or we sit and suffer in our cubicles, our souls stuffed quietly into cubbies, and make possible the machinations of an invisible empire, seemingly; as was pointed out by one of my early mentors (in head and heart if not in actuality in any timespace) Stanley Kunitz in his prose book, *A Kind of Order, A Kind of Folly*.

You are asking the wrong person this question. I'm a homegirl, not a hoper. I don't hope or wish for anything. I do. And I do believe. I believe there are forces and the forces of elements we can not know, not as a human being. I believe in history. And in the force of truth. I believe in the power of language -- to do; to make belief; the power of hope. Granted. I see it more as intent. And the sacred intent of Gaia, which is all of us, everything, this very earth, and more. I believe in the power of good poetry to, in the words of Carlos Santana about music, rearrange your molecules. For the better -- I would hope.

Okay. Okay. You got me.

As for the 21st Century, I would hope that poetry will save it.

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