

Poems by Mariano Zaro

Nun Eating a Small Apple

We are in a bus,
my mother and I.
We are going to Zaragoza.
There is a nun sitting next to us.
She looks down,
hands crossed over a bag on her lap.
Her fingers are fat.

In the middle of the trip
she takes out a small apple from the bag.
She offers the apple to me.
No words, just the gesture.
Thank you, my mother says.
I don't take the apple.

With her right thumb
The nun makes the sign of the cross
over the apple's skin.
She starts eating.
The apple is crunchy,
the first bite is loud
and the nun covers her mouth with both hands.
She has a piece of apple in her mouth.
She does not dare to chew it.
She cannot spit it out.
We look at each other.
She is probably embarrassed of her hunger.
She has shown the world that her body has needs.
The loud apple is her penitence.

After a while
she keeps eating
with small, silent, careful bites,
always covering her mouth with both hands.
She keeps eating
until there is almost nothing left,
just the thin, bare core of the apple.
No seeds remain.
Wasting food would have added another sin for confession.
When she is finished

she hides the core of the apple in her hand,
presses her lips with the back of her fist.
I notice the apple's stem sticking out
like a rebellious appendix.

NOSELESS WOMAN

The first time I saw her
it was at the doctor's office,
in the waiting room.

She was a woman
without a nose.
I was ten, she was old,
small, dark.
I was with my mother.
My mother took me many times
to the doctor's office,
but that's another story.

I know I was ten because
I had brought my math homework.
We were studying the binary system then,
we only did that in fourth grade.
One plus one was not two,
it was one-zero,
it was too complicated,
the school dropped it after a while,
and we went back to the routine of long division.

I was doing my math homework when she entered.
She came with her daughter, I believe.
The old woman did not have a nose,
she had the hole for the nose, not the nose itself.
A hole the shape of an inverted heart,
like a hazelnut.
A hole like the hole you see on a skull
where the nose used to be.
This skull was alive.
On top of the hole a tiny, white, pointy triangle—
the remains of bone, cartilage.
I could not stop staring.

My mother tried everything:
Go, get me a magazine, do your homework.

Don't you need to go to the bathroom.
I kept staring.

The woman said *It's ok. He can look.*
Do you want to look? She asked me.
And I just went toward her.
She was seated.
I stood in front of her, face to face.
I looked without restraint.
I wanted to see the inside of her head.
Does it hurt? I asked.
Sometimes. She said.

My mother apologized.
Don't worry. The woman said.

I saw her one more time, in church.
She had her nose covered
with a white gauze.
I said hello, she smiled back.

BIO:

Mariano Zaro is the author of four poetry books: *Where From/Desde Donde* (Bay Books, Santa Monica), *Poems of Erosion/Poemas de la erosión* (Carayan Press, San Francisco), *The House of Mae Rim/La casa de Mae Rim* (Carayan Press, San Francisco) and *Tres letras/Three Letters* (Walrus/Morsa, Barcelona).

His poems have been included in the anthologies *Al Aire Nuevo* (San Luis Potosí, Mexico), *New Baroque* (Los Angeles), *River's Voice* (Los Angeles) and *Luces y Sombras* (Tafalla, Spain). As a fiction writer, his short stories have appeared in several literary journals in Spain and the United States: *Menos 15*, *El signo del gorrión*, *Caracola*, *The Louisville Review*, *The Baltimore Review*, *Pinyon*, *Magnapoets* and *The Portland Review*. In 2004 he received the *Roanoke Review* Short Fiction Prize. He has translated American poets Philomene Long, Alicia Vogl Sáenz, Sarah Maclay and Tony Barnstone. He earned a Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of Granada (Spain) and a Master's in Literature from the University of Zaragoza (Spain). He currently teaches Spanish at Rio Hondo College (Whittier, CA).