University Press by calling 800.826.8911. Please note that this session will be at 1715 Sculpture Street (Kitty-corner from Mr. Chopssticks).

Participants should know that the entire set of books in TCU Press' Texas Poet Laureate Series (of which Tafolla's book is the most recent addition) can be purchased from Texas A&M Press. Enjoy the poems in this packet are encouraged to purchase the book via amazon (see Flynn above). Participants who

Attached are poems chosen for discussion at our Ojili session from Carmen Tafolla: New and Selected Poems (TCU Press, 2018).

Poems by Texas Poet Laureate Carmen Tafolla

Background Information about Tafolla can be found on her website (carmentafolla.com).
Purchase the 2015 book can find at amazon (tinyurl.com/7772749). Background information about Tafolla can be found on her website. Purchase the 2015 book can find at amazon (tinyurl.com/7772749). Background information about Tafolla can be found on her website.

This class will examine some of the best poems in Carmen Tafolla's recent volume in TCU Press Texas Poet Laureate Series. Tafolla was named the

Building: UNT Denton Campus
Room: Ojili at UNT Classroom
Session: Day(s) of Week: M
Start Date - End Date: 2/25/2019 - 2/25/2019
Time: 11:45 AM - 1:15 PM
Instructor: Stephanie Voorhees
Capacity: Remaining: 39
Fee: $100.00

Other LifeLong Learning Institute at UNT

(continued)
LOSING YOU

one piece at a time
my breath shallow, stiff
as a perfect red balloon
filled with helium and
framed by sun’s rays,
ascends into heaven
from some distant parking lot
I do not recognize

the lilt of a song disappears
a word lost here, a memory there
first, you can’t sing, or do stairs,
two-step calculations, drive
cannot finish the
sentence
walk
but

your love
still clear as crystal
sparkles through the greyblack clouds
you smile
brave
strong
still every bit the man you always
were

my breath catches in my throat
a pinprick of Destino
I wonder if the helium
is whispering out
one invisible drip of
life at a time
the beautiful red globe
floats off into the distant sky
exploring exotic places
to which I
no longer
have access
HOW SHALL I TELL YOU?

After listening to the world news, the verge of war, the firing of
warships in the Persian Gulf, international crisis after interna-
tional crisis, and wondering whether, in the morning, we would
still be here, any of us . . .

When no soul walks the softened green
and no foot beats the pulse on crumbling brown
and no one lives to sing to rain
or soak to sun the spirit of its golden gown
to weave the many colors of the after-arch
from sky to human skin to wooded wealth
in fiber fabrics beads and tusks and seeds
all leading up in rows of beauty drumbeat to black
neck, like venison in stealth

When no one lulls the child to sleep
or takes the wrinkled story’s hand
or listens to the news—a wired sound
of tribe on tribe and—stet now—man on man
how shall I tell you that I love you then?
How shall I touch your fingers tip to tip
and say that we were blood and human voice and friend?
THE MAGIC

—to the child in the photo (and all the others)

Such magic in a child there is, such life,
Such fountainburst of days and love and hope
The magic breath of tiny hands and heart
That beat and breathe and suffer try, and cope.
But ribs, like tree roots arching to the skies,
Face upward, caking o’er the ground so dry,
And hunger curls the spine, affronts our eyes:
You will not live. And yet, you will not die.

The love that ripened in your first wet cry,
The hope that sheltered you when arms could not
Will not retreat nor silent keep their sigh:
In naked truth they lash our superficial lies
(like war and wealth and coldness comfort-taught)
Your eyes now frozen in the lens and paper flat
Give hope that our hearts cold might yet survive.
For this, you will not know but grace, and, dove,
In truth as death, you will not be but love.
RIGHT IN ONE LANGUAGE

Write in one language, they say,
and agents sit and glare hairy brows
over foreign words and, almost trying hope,
say, It's not French, is it?

But it isn't.
Nor is my mind
when I try tight, clean line
manicured to be like Leave
It to Beaver's house
straight sidewalk
so square hedges
and if there's one on
this side there's also one on that
Equally paced
placed
spaced
controlled

You seem to lose control of the line
in this one, he says, it all explodes.
I see bilingue-beautiful
explosions
two worlds collide
two tongues dance
inside the cheek
together
Por aquí poquito and a dash allá también
Salsa chacha disco polka
Rock that Texan cumbia
in a molcajete mezcla!

But restrain yourself,
The Man pleads sanity,
Trim the excess
just enough and nothing more
Think Shaker room and lots of light
two windows, Puritan-clean floors and chairs
up on simple pegs, three.
y las palabritas más
   are straining at the yoke
two-headed sunflowers
peeking through St. Moderatius grass
waiting for familias grandes
garden growing wild
with Mexican hierbitas, spices, rosas,
baby trees nurtured así, muy natural
   No one knows yet
if they’re two years old
and should be weaned
or pruned
or toilet trained
but they are given only
agüa y cariñitos
shade and sun and compañía
City Inspection Crew
House and Gardens Crew
Publication Crew agree
the lack of discipline
lack of Puritan
   purity
   pior y tí.

Chaucer must have felt like this,
the old Pachuco playing his TexMex onto the page
and even then, the critics said.

   Write
   in one language.
But when he pondered all that cleanness, so controlled,
forms halved, he just could not deny
his own familia, primos from both sides
   weeds that liked to crawl
over sidewalks pa’ juntarse
visit, stretch out comfy

-42-
natural and lusty
hybrid wealth
and told them it was just because
he was undisciplined
  unpolished
  and did not know
how to make love
with just
one
person
in the room
or
on the page

And he, like me,
did what he wanted anyway
But you, like they,
want Shaker hallways
while I grow Mexican gardens
and weed-rich backyards
There are 2 many colors in the marketplace
to play modest, when Mexico and
Gloria Rodriguez both say,
\textit{Estos gringos con su Match-Match}
y \textit{a m\'i me gusta Mix-Mix!}
There are 2 many cari\'nos to be created
to stay within the lines
2 many times
when I want to tell you
  There is room
here
  for two
tongues
inside this
kiss.
Never write with pencil, 
\textit{m'i\j a}.
It is for those 
who would 
erase.
Make your mark proud 
and open,
Brave,
\hspace{1cm} beauty folded into 
its imperfection, 
Like a piece of turquoise 
marked.

Never write 
with pencil, 
\textit{m'i\j a}.
Write with ink 
or mud, 
or berries grown in 
gardens never owned, 
or, sometimes, 
if necessary, 
\hspace{1cm} blood.
THE STORYKEEPER

Instructions from an historian

In the jarros, she says,
Look in the jarros.
The ones forgotten or shoved aside,
with a broken clay lip and color dulled by years
of hard use
and unmeditated abuse.

Search between the folds of rags,
the places no one else would look.
Often they are there, hiding.

Look in the garage,
in the dark corners.
Sometimes they are undiscovered, silent,
in the tecoracho sheds out back
or dumped in the alley,
wiped away from our lives, for the trash to take.
Others, hoarded like treasures the holder fears to reveal,
wrapped in a homemade colcha, in a wooden box
under the bed.
In the viejitos' eyes, in the twilight of death,
you read their secret, the eyes point you to the spot, stamp
"Remember" on the almost-forgotten box, and plead with you
to be the keeper
of the story.
To open the box, unwrap the colcha carefully,
save the scrawled story
protect it
as best you can.

Look in the places where ink does not show.
In the breaking voice
between the lines of a song.
Our history
is written in that song,
written on the voice,
sometimes written
on the heart.

Look at the hands.
The way the woman crosses herself when she passes
a certain field.
Everyone knows the story
of what happened there
late that night ninety years ago.
Everyone knows,
but it is not written.
The paragraphs of dangling bodies were too long, too ugly
to be written,
The sentences, like unfinished lives, too short
to make sense,
The letters of the words spelled out, distorted,
ine comprehensible,
like mutilation of body parts
that started out in belleza and truth.

Look at the way she holds the masa, with both hands,
protecting, feeling its warmth,
memorizing the moment, for just a second,
before it’s split apart,
into many tortillas
each to go their own way, some consumed rapidly,
some wasted, some disappeared,
ever to be seen again.
In her gestures, her hesitations, her sigh of mourning
lie our history.

Ask the whispers, she whispers,
breathed out in unguarded moments,
when the soul is too tired to think,
the body too worn down to hurt more,
in the numbness of the night,
when the father wrestles with the unwritten history,
pleading to save it, speak it, bury it,
staring at the *pluma* across the room,
avoiding the paper.

Singing the Indian chant of a story
he will not tell his children
yet:
"They are too young.
Only 10.
Or 16.
Or 36.
Wait, wait—
I fear for them to know
what those hate-filled others
did to my grandfather.
They are too young.
Perhaps I too at only 60
am too young
to know,
too old
to forget."

Ask the whispers, she chants, Learn the chant.
Sing it slow and privately
like he does.
A sacred song
to be sung at only
sacred moments.

Look in the footwells of our steps,
the tablecorners rubbed smooth,
the marks on the walls where we have lived,
the fine and tired stitches in the clothing sewed and mended,
the careful fold of the shuck on the *tamal*.

the thumbprint curves of crepe paper flowers
trying to make "*Canta*" out of "*Llores*."

-53-
Learn to read the eyes, the hands, the spine.
You must be like a detective, or a spy.
Subtle, unnoticed, unrelenting.
For they are out there.
Our stories.
To be read in the tracks of tears now made
into wrinkles on the face,
in the scars we carry with pride,
in the grocery list marked with crayon on a junk mail
funeral home advertisement, in the Western Union
telegrams of money sent home to México,
in the eviction notices sent people whose address
has stayed the same for one hundred and fifty years.
You must be persistent, courageous. Go quickly. Urgently.
Go into the dark corners.
Unveil our treasures from the attic.
Go find it, hear it, touch it, write it down.

This is how
we keep
our
history.
This is how
we also
keep
our
soul.
FEEDING YOU

I have slipped chile under your skin
    secretly wrapped in each enchilada
hot and soothing,
carefully cut into bitefuls for you as a toddler
increasing in power and intensity as you grew
until it could burn
forever

silently spiced into the rice
soaked into the bean caldo
smoothed into the avocado

I have slipped chile under your skin
drop by fiery drop
until it ignited
the sunaltar fire
in your blood

I have squeezed cilantro into the breast milk
    made sure you were nurtured with the taste
of green life and corn stalks
with the wildness of thick leaves
of untamed monte
of unscheduled growth

I have ground the earth of these Américas in my molcajete
    until it became a fine and piquant spice
sprinkled it surely into each spoonful of food
that would have to expand to fit your soul

Dear Son
Dear Corn Chile Cilantro Son
This
is your herencia
This
is what is yours
This
  is what your mother fed you
to keep you
alive
both sides of the border

that deep delicious desire to run on two tracks
and forth or let one foot fall inside each track,
skipping
sides
to read the subtitles
hear the English words
to write one
legal lines of the legal pad
notes up the margin on a whole different
or poem

at the same time, jump back
like a little girl straddle-
two
of a curb
in Spanish and
simultaneously
story in the
and then to escape and scribble illegal
page
or poema.

I was born bilingual-
Tex and the
Mex
My first nickname was an admonition
as he painted the walls of my house
I stood between the two
Man Caes, I shouted,
our bond, our new language
Never Te vas a caer, hombre
But even then I loved the
Tex-

a lullaby between the
to a tío, primo hermano de mi papá,
perched high on a ladder
legs
a name I'd call him forever after, and he me
never as correct as expected
or even, You're gonna fall, man!
octopus arms of my mother language
Mex
stay within the required lines
not quite step on a crack, break your mother's back
sides

to be deste lado y
to straddle
one foot falling on this side
but more fun when I
above the world of
owned
dese lado
the concrete curb
next foot falling on the other
rode the curb, balancing
territories
laughing in my
freedom from either
and both

we were free from México
not even bound by their laws
but to prove we were not conquered property of the US
we sassily insisted on still saying "La Capital"
not for Washington DC but for Mexico City.

My tongue runs to jump the language boundaries sampling like a
gleeefully wild child, of the goodies spread out on both tables
all stuffed into the mouth at once by fingers no forks, no limits, no portions
all impulse You can run, you can get away—
The viejita watching the desserts can't catch you
You are sin verguenza, high and high-powered
wound up with the freeness sin zapatos
without limites

I write two novels at the same time
I take two languages, savor them with no restrictions
no one measuring portions.
I stuff myself with tasty words of
opposing origins
I laugh, am unbroken the donkey who still rears up
on hind legs to jump over the log instead of lifting
one leg at a time, ladylike, to be gentle for passengers
No, forget your hats, hang on to your seats the ride is wild, it's
not guaranteed, it's not even defined You don't know which
of the two dictionaries to use
Like life and death, it gets all tangled together
Maybe you're hearing me talk maybe you're hearing yourself
maybe I answered a question maybe I gave two different answers
like, which religion am I? Well, kind of Catholic, pero sin papeles
since I was born and baptized a barrio Protestant. Well okay, you say,
let's write down Christian that ought to define it.
Well, no, I say, like what I am mainly is Native American
you frown at Guadalupana
the framed picture on begin to study
Guadalupe, alias my wall of the darkskinned Virgin of
Aztec goddess Tonantzín

Um, also mixed with Sephardic Jew.
You check for papers.
No, I explain all unofficial, of course.
I'm a mojada. I don't got papers.

But I do got citizenship two of 'im.
Like I got ownership. Without the deeds.
These places are mine. These spaces are mine.
These borders are mine. Both sides of the river.
It's not that I don't belong. It's just that I
belong twice. Don't we all?

It is time.
I want an altar. No, two.
One will be an
Altar to Lupe, the pregnant
virgin (Well, most things are
medically possible aren't they?)
The Catholic Holy Mother with unborn mestizo baby—yes, openly PG
Wearing her black belt the Aztec sign of pregnancy
Brown Indian face,
Moon, Sun, Gold Stars in cloak Red dress, Black belt of
Pregnancy, identical to the Aztec Goddess Tonatzín.
A Spanish plot? To convert Indians to Catholicism?
No, an Indian plot To convert Catholicism to Indians.
Subversively they called her Queen of the Americas,
Her only Crown the Indian Sun, simultaneous with a
Footstool Moon, her hands folded humbly, no one's fooled.
I'll keep her big bright Mexican Colors, Green and red with gold stars
But maybe I'll add something (Blue jeans? Dreamcatcher earrings?)
Green card? Maybe not.

We pray to her She prays to someone else, maybe to us?
Please, Virgencita . . . Please, non-Virgencitos . . .
Protect us we say Attack, she says, Charge ahead for yourselves.

The other box drawer, altar
becomes a Dia de los Muertos.
I'll call it All My Children, like the soap opera, with the
ad from the soap opera pasted behind it
and pictures of all my kids, even the ones who weren't
born. Children, the very sprouting of
life but in the middle of Dia de los Muertos, the very sprouting of
death And like in every Day of the Dead altar, everyone in it will be
a muertito a little laughing skeleton.
So there will be my kids, all of 'm
The live muertitos and the dead muertitos.
All with sweatsuits from Old Navy, or Ross, or the Dollar Store
in different colors and their initial on it
And also mis books and ideas and ancestors, and a bunch of other
people who aren't my children but
could've been and a globe of
the world.

Drawers altares
in my home two, so you never get too serious about
just one never get too committed to
one ideology one language
one focus one religión.
My bicultural bi-altaires
one to an Aztec Christian
pregnant virgin. And one to
all the dead we've loved before
Hung together, to life and to death
Or is it, to death and to life. Or is it,
both things at the same time
in both places
always both sides of every border
This river here
is full of me and mine.
This river here
is full of you and yours.

Right here
(or maybe a little farther down)
My great-grandmother washed the dirt
out of her family's clothes,
soaking them, scrubbing them,
bringing them up
clean.

Right here
(or maybe a little farther down)
My grampa washed the sins
out of his congregation's souls,
baptizing them, scrubbing them,
bringing them up
clean.

Right here
(or maybe a little farther down)
My great-great grandma froze with fear
as she glimpsed,
between the lean, dark trees,
a lean, dark Indian peering at her.
She ran home screaming, "¡Ay, los Indios!
Aí vienen los I-i-indios!!"
as he threw pebbles at her,
laughing.
Till one day she got mad
and stayed
and threw pebbles
right back at him!
After they got married,
they built their house right here
(or maybe a little farther down.)

Right here,
my father gathered
mesquite beans and wild berries
working with a passion
during the Depression.
His eager sweat poured off
and mixed so easily
with the water of this river here.

Right here,
my mother cried in silence,
so far from her home,
sitting with her one brown suitcase,
a traveled trunk packed full with blessings,
and rolling tears of loneliness and longing
which mixed (again so easily)
with the currents of this river here.

Right here we'd pour out picnics,
and childhood's blood from
dirty scrapes on dirty knees,
and every generation's first-hand stories
of the weeping lady La Llorona
haunting the river every night,
crying "Ayyy, mis hi-i-i-ijos!"—
(It happened right here!)

The fear dripped off our skin
and the blood dripped off our scrapes
and they mixed with the river water,
right here.

Right here,
the stories and the stillness
of those gone before us
haunt us still,
now grown, our scrapes in different places,
the voices of those now dead
quieter,
but not too far away

Right here we were married,
you and I,
and the music filled the air,
danced in,
dipped in,
mixed in
with the river water.

dirt and sins,
fear and anger,
sweat and tears, love, music,
Blood.
And memories
It was right here!

And right here we stand,
washing clean our memories,
baptizing our hearts,
gathering past and present,
dancing to the flow
we find
right here
or maybe—
a little farther
down.