

Latinidad – April 2007: Poetry

Contents:

1. Saludos: Poetry
2. Q&A: Francisco Aragón
3. Upcoming Workshops: Wordsmitten Writing Workshop
4. Resources: International Poetry Contest

Please forward to fellow writers, both published and pre-published. Thank you!

1. Saludos

For writers seeking guidance on how to publish poems, whether individually or as a collection, this month's Q&A with respected poet Francisco Aragón should prove enlightening. Also of interest will be the Colrain Poetry Manuscript Conference, which is geared towards poets seeking book publication; read on for more details.

Helping Latino writers get published,

Marcela Landres

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2. Q&A

A native of San Francisco and long-time resident of Spain, Francisco Aragón is the author of *Puerta del Sol* (Bilingual Press) and editor of the recently released, *The Wind Shifts: New Latino Poetry* (University of Arizona Press). His own work has appeared in various anthologies, including *Inventions of Farewell: A Book of Elegies* (W.W. Norton & Company), *American Diaspora: Poetry of Displacement* (University of Iowa Press) and, more recently, *Evensong: Contemporary American Poets on Spirituality* (Bottom Dog Press) and *Deep Travel: Contemporary American Poets Abroad* (Ninebark Press). In the area of translation, from the Spanish, he has published a number of books by Francisco X. Alarcón, including *Body in Flames*, (Chronicle Books), *Of Dark Love* (Moving Parts Press) and *Sonnets to Madness and other Misfortunes* (Creative Arts Book Company). His poems and translations have appeared in various print and web publications including *Chain*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Chelsea*, *The Journal*, and the online journals *Jacket*, *The Electronic Poetry Review*, and *Poetry Daily*. Among his limited edition chapbooks are *Tertulia*, (BOOKlyn). He directs *Letras Latinas*, the literary program of the Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame where he oversees, among other projects, *Momotombo Press* (<http://www.momotombopress.com/>). For more information, please visit <http://franciscoaragon.net/>.

Which author or book inspires you, and why?

In one sense, my formative years as a poet were the late eighties. UC Berkeley, despite the fact that it didn't offer a Creative Writing degree, had a great poetry faculty whose

work inspired me and, more importantly, directed me to other poets. The late Thom Gunn, for example, in addition to being a model himself, led me to the work of Robert Duncan on the one hand, and August Kleinzahler on the other. Duncan, to oversimplify, provided a model on how untraditional rhyme and the musicality of language is a must if one ever aspires to write a decent poem. Kleinzahler's ear for human speech and his skill at depicting what I'll call urban landscapes continues to guide me. And Kleinzahler introduced me to the work of Basil Bunting. Robert Pinsky, before departing for Boston University, instilled in me the belief that the poem is not fully realized until uttered aloud by someone other than the poet. This remains true today—so much so that I enjoy reading aloud other people's poems more than my own. My first poetry teacher was the African American writer Ishmael Reed and he was responsible for directing my attention to Gary Soto and Victor Hernández Cruz who opened the world of Latino poetry to me. I can see that names of women poets are disturbingly absent from this list! The work of Denise Levertov had a similar effect on me as Duncan's.

Why do you love to write poetry?

I fell into poetry by chance. In high school my English classes were my favorite so I intuitively knew that I loved to read and write. As a sophomore in college, I decided to sign up for a writing workshop. But there was such a demand for these that one had to submit a manuscript to be admitted. I turned in a sample of writing to a poetry workshop and one to a fiction workshop. Fiction rejected me, poetry didn't. This was followed by joining the staff of the Berkeley Poetry Review—an activity that became key during my years at Berkeley. So in reflecting upon your question, I guess I can't separate the pleasure of poetry—which is really the pleasure of language—from the communities that might arise from poetry. As an undergraduate student, it was the community a literary magazine provided, now it's working within, and on behalf of, the Latino literary community. But the pleasure of fiddling with language, of aspiring to create a linguistic work of art, regardless of its subject or style, is what draws me.

What is your writing ritual?

There are different kinds of writing and each yields, for better or for worse, different work habits. When I translate poetry, for example, I can be very systematic and just work through a manuscript and then go back and tinker and tinker. With my own work, it's not nearly as systematic. Different types of poems have different types of beginnings. Some poems might begin with a sensory experience (smelling something, hearing a particular song while walking down a particular street, etc.) that unearths a long buried memory that might yield the first or last line of a poem. If that impulse really gets hold of me, then I enter a phase where I'm working on a poem both on paper and in my head for a stretch of days or weeks—all to produce a first draft. From there it's anyone's guess how many drafts and how much time might transpire until I consider a poem finished. In the interim—if I'm in a writing group or a workshop—other sets of eyes and sensibilities weigh in. In recent years, a lot of poems have had as springboards other poems, or lines from other poems. This practice was introduced to me by John Matthias who has been a crucial

mentor these past few years at Notre Dame. Matthias is who inspired my current project of producing liberal versions of the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío. So, to answer your question, I don't have a routine. One might say that my method is rather undisciplined. There are fallow periods (I'm in one now) where I mostly edit and publish other people's poetry, and read. Which brings me to another lesson a mentor—August Kleinzahler—imparted: these fallow periods are equally important as the productive ones. When I first moved to Spain, his correspondence re-assured me that my experiences there, in the long run, would yield work, that I shouldn't try to force it, and he was right. All this is not to say that I wouldn't benefit from trying different approaches.

For aspiring poets who are just starting out and don't yet have a book-length collection of work, how would you recommend they get their individual pieces published?

My first publication was in a college literary journal solely for undergraduates, so if an aspiring poet is that early in his/her trajectory (I want to avoid the term "career"), I would encourage them to try placing poems in those types of venues if they feel publication is important to them. But I have to say—and this is just my personal view—that I would encourage an "aspiring poet" who is "just starting out" not to be especially concerned with publication. If he/she finds him/herself preoccupied with publication, then I would begin to question their motivations for being involved in the art. When I talk about publication here, I mean sending work to established literary journals. The poet Heather McHugh shared the anecdote—in a Pinsky-led workshop at Berkeley—that she lamented publishing in her first book all the poems that had appeared in journals. It was a very fat book. I think what she was getting at was this: just because a poem gets placed in a journal doesn't mean it's a very good poem or that it belongs in a book. In other words, it's very possible to start publishing too soon. If, on the other hand, the interest in publication is being informed by the desire to share your work with your immediate physical community and to build community, then I would temper my advice and echo one of the most valuable lessons I learned from Gary Snyder during my years at UC Davis. And that is: small press and, yes, self-publishing might be a way to go. And I mean here none other than the small limited edition chapbook that one gives away to friends, both poet and non-poet alike.

Other than honing their craft, what advice would you give to Latino poets looking to land a book deal?

I guess where poetry is concerned I'm suspicious of terminology like "land a book deal" because it suggests that publication is more important than writing good poems. But that may be my bias—which was strengthened after interning at a literary agency on Fifth Avenue in the summer of 2002. But I'll address it. First, however, I want to say something about "Latino poets." I want to make this explicit. One crucial piece of advice I would give to Latino/a poets, in addition to honing their craft, is to read as widely and as variously as possible. It may seem obvious, but sometimes I think it needs to be spelled out: read other Latino/a poets of course. But read non-Latino/a poets, too. Read formal poetry; read free verse poetry; read poetry in translation; learn another language

and try your hand at translating. As far as trying to get a first book into print, one advantage that Latino/a poets do seem to have these days is that there are some venues for publishing a first book that don't involve the contest circuit which, in essence, is like playing the lottery, in my view. Once the Latino/a poet in question has been working at their craft for some time, and has even begun to enjoy a certain amount of success in placing poems in journals, I would encourage the poet to consider publishing a chapbook before trying to publish that first full-length collection. I think that in some circles there is a bias against the idea of a chapbook. I don't think there should be. There is a long and rich tradition in American poetry of chapbooks publishing. A chapbook is like a calling card. You can sell them at readings; you can send them to publishers; you can give them away. You are cultivating a readership—one reader at a time. And this is key in poetry. A chapbook can serve as a bridge for that first full-length book. Here, my model is the defunct Chicano Chapbook Series, which published such writers as Sandra Cisneros, Alberto Ríos, and Rigoberto González, early in their trajectories as literary artists.

3. Upcoming Workshops

WHAT: The Wordsmitten Writing Workshop will give you the tools to research your topic for a manuscript, write a compelling query letter, find a literary agent, and discover great tips for writing your book proposal. In addition, editorial consultant Marcela Landres will meet with writers one-on-one and review up to ten pages of their manuscripts. Advance reservations are recommended.

WHEN: Saturday, June 9, 8:30am - 4:30 pm

WHERE: Feather Sound Country Club, 2201 Feather Sound Drive, Clearwater, FL 33762

WHO:

Margo Hammond, founder of the Festival of Books, famed co-author and commentator of the renowned Book Babes blog, and former book editor of the St. Petersburg Times.

Marcela Landres, editorial consultant, formerly an editor at Simon & Schuster, and creator of Latinidad, one of the 101 Best Web Sites for Writers by Writer's Digest Magazine.

Kate Sullivan, executive editor of WordSmitten Media, Inc. and www.wordsmitten.com, a digital media and print publishing company established more than seven years ago.

Lynn Wiese, literary publicist with Russell Public Communications and author.

Robert Plunket, Sarasota Magazine's senior editor,

Tom Valeo, existential memoirist.

REGISTER: Please visit <http://www.wordsmitten.com/>.

QUESTIONS: Please contact Kate Sullivan at editor@wordsmitten.com.

Invite me to speak for your organization: <http://www.marcelalandres.com/Request%20a%20Workshop.html>

List of upcoming workshops: <http://www.marcelalandres.com/Workshops.html>

4. Resources

When you contact these organizations, please mention that you were referred by the Latinidad® Newsletter. Thank you, and let me know what happens.

INTERNATIONAL POETRY CONTEST

Deadline: May 11

A prize of \$2,007 and publication in Atlanta Review will be given for a single poem in this year's annual International Poetry Competition. For more information please visit <http://www.atlantareview.com/>.

NYC LATINA WRITERS GROUP

When: Friday, April 6th at 7:00PM

The NYCLWG welcomes Linda Nieves-Powell, (Producer, Writer, Director) and author of the soon to be released novel "Freestyle," a funny and inspiring novel about two thirty-something Latinas who decide to do a Thelma and Louise, escaping their to-do lists to revisit their past. Please join us for Linda's reading and talk on her journey creating, living, and publishing her novel. For more information visit: <http://writers.meetup.com/532/>.

BOOKMAKING WORKSHOP FOR WRITERS

Date: Saturday, April 14th, 2007, from 1 to 6 p.m.

Where: Tanya Torres' Studio, El Barrio, NY

Learn how to design and make a handmade book, how to plan an edition of your book, some tips for illustrating your writing (really easy for non-artists!), and ideas on how to promote your book. For more information, please visit <http://gatheringjoy.blogspot.com/>.

POETRY MANUSCRIPT CONFERENCE

Dates: May 4-7

The Colrain Poetry Manuscript Conference is designed to set poets with a manuscript-in-progress on a path towards book publication. Highlights include a manuscript preparation workshop, meetings with poetry press editors, panels, critiques, and readings. For more information, please visit <http://www.concordpoetry.org/Colrain/>.

THE LATINA SOURCE PODCAST

The Latina Source is a bi-monthly entertaining, inspiring and informative podcast on the craft of writing. Host Alicia Anabel is the founder and organizer of The NYC Latina's Writers Group. Produced by Latino Flavored Productions Inc., this podcast features interviews with publishing power players, book reviews, author interviews, tips, advice and up-to-date information on what's going on in the world of publishing with respect to Latino writers. Listen here: <http://www.thelatinasource.blogspot.com>.

BROOKLYN BOOK FESTIVAL SEEKS VENDORS

The first ever Brooklyn Book Festival was launched last year and was a huge success, attracting over 10,000 attendees, sponsorships from companies like Target, much media attention including articles in the New York Times, and featuring authors such as Jonathan Lethem, Ann Brashares, and Jhumpa Lahiri. This year's Festival, which is scheduled to take place on Sunday, September 16, promises to be even bigger and better, and vendors are invited to participate. To apply please visit <http://www.brooklynbookfestival.org/>.

CRESCENT MOON PRESS SEEKS SUBMISSIONS

Publisher of Romantic Science Fiction and Fantasy seeks creative storytelling and original style. They are looking for authors who show extraordinary ability to weave tales of romance through strong, unforgettable characters, plots that twist and turn with layers of conflict and emotion, and a style that sets them apart from other writers in the market. Please visit their website at <http://www.crescentmoonpress.com/> to find out more about submission guidelines and compensation packages.

VILLAGE VOICE SEEKS EDITOR

The Village Voice has an immediate opening for an arts & culture editor. Qualified candidates must have significant experience in arts journalism and a solid understanding of and interest in pop culture. The arts & culture editor will manage writers and assign stories in such fields as theater, art, books, and dance. The most promising candidates will be asked to take an editing test. Applicants should send a cover letter, resume, and their five best clips to: Tony Ortega, Editor-in-Chief, The Village Voice, 36 Cooper Square, New York, NY 10003. No phone calls or e-mails, please.

SIMON AND SCHUSTER SEEKS BILINGUAL INTERN

The intern will work on the Latino line in the Atria division, reviewing proposals, assisting in the development of a marketing and distribution plan, and aiding the production process. Must know Mac and/or PC, strong knowledge of Spanish grammar and fluent in Spanish a plus. Experience in editing and/or copyediting Spanish language context. To apply, send resume with cover letter (on the subject line indicate "bilingual intern/Atria") to internships@simonandschuster.com. No telephone calls please.

PUBLISHER SEEKS BOOK DESIGNER

Northwest US/Canadian-based publisher seeks a freelance Spanish-speaking designer familiar with book design and ideally with Indesign files. Finished Indesign files need review and prep for printing book that has been translated into Spanish. Keen eye for correct Spanish word breaks and ensure overall layout follows the original book appropriately. Experienced designers only, please contact:

chaight@hartleyandmarks.com.

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NOMINATE WWW.MARCELALANDRES.COM

If you like my web site, please nominate it for next year's Writer's Digest Magazine's "The 101 Best Web Sites for Writers" list. Send nominations to writersdig@fwpubs.com with "101 Best Web Sites" as the subject line and include a brief note explaining how <http://www.marcelalandres.com/> has helped you. Thank you in advance for your support!

CONSULTATIONS

I edit manuscripts, critique proposals and advise on how to launch and maintain a successful writing career. If you are interested in a consultation, please visit <http://www.marcelalandres.com/>, click on Services, and follow the instructions.

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"Beginning things is the first sign of intelligence. Finishing what you have begun is the second."—Panchatantra

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