

Latinidad - Spring 2019: Sara Borjas

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BEFORE YOU SEND IT OUT

“You gave me two amazing bits of advice that I immediately followed and have proved to be so fruitful: 1) If you want to write for children you have to become a member of SCBWI, and 2) Get your name out there and you can start by taking the Op-Ed Project’s courses. I did both. Most amazingly, it was at my first national SCBWI conference that I got my big break. Thank you for being the fantastic powerhouse that you are, for sharing your knowledge of this industry with Latinx writers, and for believing in our stories. I am and will be forever grateful to you!”

—Aida Salazar, author of *The Moon Within*, <http://www.aidasalazar.com>

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1. Saludos

Every so often as I read “Heart Like a Window, Mouth Like a Cliff” by Sara Borjas, I had to stop and say, “Preach!” Her poems break dysfunctional generational cycles, seek (if not quite find) identity, and fling my heart into my mouth. With this propitious debut, Borjas has earned a spot on your list of writers to watch. To learn more, read the Q&A below with Sara Borjas, author of “Heart Like a Window, Mouth Like a Cliff.”

Helping Latinos get published,

Marcela Landres

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2. Q&A

Sara Borjas is a Xicanx pocha and a Fresno poet. Her debut collection of poetry, “Heart Like a Window, Mouth Like a Cliff” is forthcoming from Noemi Press in 2019. She co-hosts and produces “The Lovesick Poetry Podcast”—a west coast poetry podcast launching in 2019, alongside IRL cousin and award-winning poet, Joseph Rios. Sara is a 2017 CantoMundo Fellow, a 2016 Postgraduate Writers Conference Fellow at Vermont College of Fine Arts, and a 2013 Community of Writers Workshop at Squaw Valley Fellow. She is the recipient of the 2014 Blue Mesa Poetry Prize and a three-

time Pushcart Prize nominee. She lives in Los Angeles but stays rooted in Fresno. For more information, visit <http://www.saraborjas.com>

Q: Latino parents often want their children to grow up to become doctors, lawyers, or a similar profession with a stable income. How did you succeed in forging a path as a writer because of (or despite) your parents?

A: Although I know that is what some Latinx experiences are like, I'm happy to say that because there are so many ways to be Latinx, that mine was different. I had planned to go to law school after years of simply fucking around because I recognized how expressing yourself clearly and navigating laws and the language of laws meant survival for so many people. Not because my parents wanted it. In fact, I think I've always felt that no one expected me to be here, to graduate with a master's degree, to be a professional writer, but to be married and to have kids. But I don't know that I can say it was my parent's expectations or mine. What I do know is that the sacrifices my family has made has afforded me the privilege of this uncertainty and choice.

Q: You say about your parents in the acknowledgements page, "this book is your work as much as it is mine." Your family is arguably an integral part of many of the poems in this collection. Did this awareness liberate and/or challenge you? How?

A: I felt challenged to represent my family. My perspective is mine, and what I did not want to do was oversimplify the fears and anxieties of my father and mother. A professor told me once, when I expressed misrepresenting my family, that the best thing you could do for another person is render them as complex. And I've always tried to do that.

Natalie Diaz says in an interview where she's asked a similar question that it could be equally true that we betray our family by writing about them but we also betray them AND ourselves by not. This has been a guiding stance for me.

Q: In the Notes section you list a community of artists, past and present, who have inspired your own work. How have these other voices helped you find and/or define your voice?

A: I think they presented a range of possibilities for my voice as a Latinx writer. Language limits when it defines. This is something I wholeheartedly believe. I think we spend so much time as Latinx writers forging a space, that we cling to it, scared it will be taken away, but in a way that limits or

“defines” what is Latinx to the degree of misrepresentation. These writers made room through tone and by using irony and humor, subject by writing about orgasms and farts alongside academic inclusion and God, and were playful where we brown folks are expected only to suffer and to struggle. They let me feel joy when I didn’t expect it from myself.

Q: Aside from being a published poet, you are a lecturer in the Department of Creative Writing at UC Riverside. How has teaching informed your writing? What have your students taught you?

A: I teach what I want to learn, and I learn alongside my students. Most of my students aren’t jaded by the writing world yet and they have romantic ideas as well as wild ideas about what they can say and what’s publishable. I do my best to teach them the Euro-centric traditions we have inherited, to show them how to appreciate what they can in them, and then to radically subvert them, to contradict them, to craft them so they contradict themselves. As the poet Angel Garcia says, we work to see what our political intervention is. There is always a political intervention when we write. They expand the range of acts that I have considered intervention with their knowledge of anime, apps, pop culture, etc.

Q: How did you come to be published by Noemi Press?

A: I started working with Carmen Gimenez-Smith after my manuscript was a finalist for the Noemi Poetry Prize a couple years ago and she reached out to me and offered help. She and poet Blas Falconer spent a lot of time editing with me and over two years, we finally had a book.

Q: Other than honing their craft, what advice would you give to Latino writers looking to publish a poetry collection?

A: I’m not an expert or filled with insight, but I would say don’t revise toward comfort, yours or anyone else’s. If an editor wants you to explain yourself in a poem or is uncomfortable with something, they’re editing towards their aesthetic and don’t care enough about yours. Find and work with folks who want to see you, who want you to take risks.

Q: Do you have upcoming projects that my readers should have on their radar?

A: I have a poetry podcast with my IRL cousin-poet, Joseph Rios, called The Lovesick Poetry Podcast debuting sometime this year. We interview poets about things they love, things that make them sick, things they love so much

it's sick. We are completely producing and editing everything ourselves, which we are realizing is an incredible amount of work. But it will premiere this year, and it will be dope. Trust that.

### 3. Resources

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#### CANTOMUNDO POETRY PRIZE

Deadline: April 15

A prize of \$1000 and publication by the University of Arkansas Press is given for a poetry collection by a Latinx writer. For more information, visit <https://www.uapress.com/cantomundopoetryseries/>

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#### NONFICTION BOOK AWARD

Deadline: April 15

Panther Creek Book Award in Nonfiction offers \$1000 and publication by Hidden River Press for an original, unpublished book-length work of non-fiction including creative non-fiction, memoir, and biography. This competition is open to international submissions for all writers in English. For more information, visit <https://hiddenriverarts.wordpress.com>

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#### \$1500 SHORT STORY/ESSAY AWARDS

Deadline: May 1

The Curt Johnson Prose Awards in Fiction and Creative Nonfiction offer two prizes of \$1500 each and publication in December magazine for a short story and an essay. For more information, visit <http://decembermag.org>

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#### HISTORICAL NOVEL CONFERENCE

Regular Registration Deadline: April 15

Late Registration Deadline: May 15

The Historical Novel Society North American Conference will be held from June 20 to June 22 in Oxon Hill, Maryland across the river from Washington, D.C. The conferences features workshops, panels, pitch sessions with agents and editors, and manuscript critiques. For more information, visit <https://hns-conference.com>

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#### SEEKING ESSAYS ABOUT POWER

Deadline: June 10

Creative Nonfiction Journal seeks true stories that explore the power dynamics within groups and systems, however big or small—for example, family units, schools, sports, churches, and government. For more information, visit <https://www.creativenonfiction.org>

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#### WREN POETRY PRIZE

Deadline: June 15

This contest is open only to poets who have had no more than one full-length poetry collection published. Prize is \$1000 and publication by Blair. For more information, visit <https://www.blairpub.com>

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#### YES, POETRY

Yes Poetry is a lifestyle art publication that encourages deep analyzation and thought, pushing for progressive change and identification. As such, they publish interviews, reviews, essays, visual art, a poet of the month, special features, and themed series. Women, queer, non-binary, and POC artists are encouraged to submit. For more information, visit <http://www.yespoetry.com>

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#### SEEKING FLASH FICTION

Fiction Southeast is an online literary journal dedicated to short fiction. They publish fiction weekly as well as essays, reviews, and interviews. Past contributors include Joyce Carol Oates, Robert Olen Butler, Aimee Bender, and many others. For more information, visit <https://fictionsoutheast.com>

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#### SEEKING FICTION BY DIVERSE AUTHORS

The Kindred Books imprint edited by Vanessa Willoughby for Brain Mill Press seeks diverse authors and literature with a strong voice. They are especially interested in fiction that evokes the stylistic language and themes of authors such as Jesmyn Ward, Zadie Smith, and Celeste Ng. For more information, visit <http://www.brainmillpress.com/>

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#### JUST PUBLISHED: BALLAD OF A SLOPSUCKER BY JUAN ALVARADO VALDIVIA

Juan Alvarado Valdivia's debut collection of short stories, *Ballad of a Slopsucker*, grapples with grief, failure, and frustration but also with hope and the possibility of redemption. These twelve stories, which center on Latino protagonists in the San Francisco Bay Area, delve into conflicts of masculinity, longing, and self-destruction. Juan Alvarado Valdivia is a Peruvian-American writer who was born in Guadalajara, Mexico and raised in Fremont, CA. His first book, *¡Cancerlandia!: A Memoir*, received an Honorable Mention for the 2016 International Latino Book Award for Best Biography in English. For more information, visit <http://www.juanalvaradovaldivia.com/>

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“I wish my poems could save us from our parents’ childhoods.”

—Sara Borjas

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