

Melissa Castillo-Garsow is a PhD Candidate in American Studies and African American Studies at Yale University completing a dissertation about Mexican migration to New York City. As the author and editor of three books, four book chapters and seven peer reviewed articles, Melissa introduces new ways of looking at migration, ethnicity, race and gender in the US via both scholarly and creative interventions in the fields of Latin@, Latin American, American and African American Studies. Her dissertation, "A Mexican State of Mind: New York City and the New Borderlands of Culture" establishes a much needed dialogue between African American and Borderlands studies by considering the recent history of Mexican migration to New York within the context of a much longer history of black and brown laboring bodies.

Melissa is the co-editor with Jason Nichols of *La Verdad: An International Dialogue on Hip Hop Latinidades*, recently published with Ohio State University's Global Latino/a Studies, as well as the editor of a forthcoming anthology, *Manteca!: An Anthology of Afro-Latin@ Poets* with Arte Público Press. Most recently, Melissa completed guest editing a special issue of the *Words. Beats & Life: The International Journal of Hip Hop Culture* about Hip Hop in Brazil, after which she was appointed the journal's newest Managing Editor. With this position, she looks forward to continuing to facilitate a discussion about hip hop's global reach and development with scholars, writers and artists around the world.

A highly sought after fiction writer and poet, her first novel, *Pure Bronx*, was released by Augustus Publishing in Fall 2013 and her first volume of poetry *Coatlícuē Eats the Apple* was published in 2016 by VerseSeven. Melissa has been invited to present her scholarly and creative work around the world including Seoul National University, Jadavpur University (Kolkata, India), Swarthmore University and University of Chicago.

## Limonada

by Melissa Castillo-Garsow

*"Take one pint of water, add a half pound of sugar, the juice of eight lemons, the zest of half lemon. Pour the water into one, then to another several times. Strain through a clean napkin. Grandmother. The alchemist. You spun gold out of this hard life."*<sup>1</sup>

### 1. EARTH

**I tried to make a home out of you**<sup>2</sup>  
in spite of the tradition  
of men and my blood  
but your past and my future merged  
what a fucking curse.

this is  
not what  
was or  
should be  
this be  
not what  
it  
should  
not  
be  
it  
is  
the subject of grief.

when i sat in the dark  
trying to answer that  
one question that haunts  
me – that quality I cant see.

Why am I so unlovable?

i sit in the dark more and more  
now that all the family im left  
is the family i chose  
and i don't trust myself to  
choose anything and probably shouldn't.

### **I tried to make a home of you**

and i would have done anything  
to hear you say  
soy orgulloso de ti  
not estoy  
soy



Why are we so unlovable?

Healing starts at the wound  
 but this wound cannot be found  
 hidden & everywhere  
 not because i forgive you  
 not because i forgot you  
 i'll never forgive  
         never      forget  
 you are still the love of my life  
 and i hate that.

So I'm stuck in this risky business  
 the torturer became my remedy<sup>8</sup>  
 talking back  
 moving up  
 object to subject  
 empty to overflowing  
 silence to thundering

transported      deported  
 it's not that passage  
 it's modern passage  
 people stacked like fruit baskets  
 containers like legos  
 a border turned trailer  
 trash trailers bringing  
 forgotten answers to  
 containment en desierto.

Voyage through death  
         to surveillance upon these shores<sup>9</sup>  
 Yemaya stood on that shore  
 Yemaya blew that wire fence down  
 The sea cannot be fenced<sup>10</sup>  
**I cannot be fenced.**

It's more than a 1950 mile wound  
 it is an open wound  
 that splits my soul  
         that splits this country  
 that makes him look  
 and want to see me  
         across that border.

**Stop.**

This pussy is not yours  
 for the taking.

you look when i say you can  
 look when i say

you can look now  
 im letting you look now  
 look now  
 see me  
 watch me  
         watch me

**watch me walk away.**

Agua de Limón. Los ingredientes son básicos. Jugo de limón, azúcar blanca y agua simple. Un limón y dos cucharadas de azúcar por taza de agua. El balance perfecto de dulzor y acidez. Mejor con una pizca de sal. Servido en la jarra correcta con mucho hielo.

### 3. FIRE

*Life handed me lemons. I jumped back in the public eye and squirted lemon juice in it.*<sup>11</sup>

155th  
         stop.  
 my heart  
 still stops  
         i gasp  
 see his suit  
**red power tie**  
 that tie made  
 to trick me  
 entice me  
 tie me  
         down

Stop.  
 I tell my mind -  
 155th  
         stop.  
 It's over  
         stop.  
 I imagined  
         him  
         stop.

It's been 294 days  
 293 nights  
 that I still can't  
 sleep through  
         breath through  
         write down  
 from all those times -

**Stop.**

155th  
 stop.  
 You passed that  
 stop.  
 You're safe  
 stop.  
 I tell my mind -  
 155th  
 stop.  
 It's over  
 stop.  
 I imagined -

**Stop.**

I am no longer in denial  
 I am no longer grieving.

**You should have known i was fire.**<sup>22</sup>

Maybe this is where the uber driver comes in  
 because that last drive  
 was the last time  
 I could pretend I still loved you  
 dressed in that sparkling silver dress  
 the girl finally invited to the ball  
 I looked over and knew it was over  
 that some moments  
 were not for me  
 that I would never be that girl..

No enlightenment  
 Fuck growth  
 Definitely, Fuck cheating.  
 You're not a cheater  
 You're a destroyer  
 an annihilator  
 You're a lit match  
 and I

Gasoline.  
 disappointed by another man  
 not at all surprised to be disappointed  
 by another man,  
 regretting the day  
 I let another man  
 disappoint.

So I kept the poem  
 Fuck the ball  
 I'm not a grower -  
 kill plants like I kill relationships –

I'm that wild girl  
 that would rather  
 love poetry  
 that girl that picks up the bat  
 Breaks the bat  
 Breaks the bones  
 Is the bones.

In poetry  
 my hips grind  
 to the bass bawse beat  
 In poetry  
 my hips grind  
 you & me  
 in fire  
 my hips grind  
 you into dust  
 dust to dust

That too,  
 Is a form of worship  
 and today,  
 I reserve my workshop  
 for Oshun  
 dancing over Brooklyn  
 bright yellow  
 breaking hearts  
 breaking beats  
 unleashing water everywhere  
 She goes.

I worship her  
 with a baseball bat  
 to your lemon tree  
 picnic  
 to enjoy the wreckage.

skipping home,  
 I whisper  
 the danger is  
 the danger is  
 the danger is me.

**How did you not know i was fire?**

These hip that have never been captured  
 that go where they want to go  
 that do what they want to do  
 mighty hips  
 magic hips<sup>23</sup>

My hips grind

Maiz & canela  
 en molcajete  
 My hips grind  
 love & anger  
 over men.

**V. AIR**

*The greatest lie ever told about love is that it sets you free.*<sup>14</sup>

I have been a woman  
 too long  
 I am a woman  
 who is not  
 white  
 I am also a woman  
 who is afraid  
 afraid of being  
 unoriginal  
 of being  
 invisible  
 afraid of knowing what dishonesty  
 smells like –

**US dumping trash in Mexican waters.**

So between you & me  
 between the world & bey  
 this is between me & bey  
 this is between bey & black women  
 this is between me & black women  
 because we forgot about Maud<sup>15</sup> again.  
 And we're forgetting about Rekia & Bettie & Korryn & Jessica &  
 Kisha, Laronda, India, Kisha Michael, Sahlah, Janet, Marquesha,  
 Alexia

**#Saytheirnames**

I say their names  
 here  
 because we've already lost the names  
 of the Mexican women  
 that built this country.

When did braceros become men?  
 When Chicanos become men?  
 When did Pachucos lose their dance partners?  
 When did police victims become men?

Healing begins with the wound  
 but it also begins with a million girls

black & brown girls  
 raising arms  
 raising bats  
 Chanting:

**You are strong. You are terrifying. You are so much more than Jay-Z.  
 Your beauty is not simply something to behold  
 but something  
 We. Could. Do.**

So when a black man says  
 Happy Birthday  
 Happy New Year  
 to 18-year-old refugees  
 - they would be refugees -  
 but they're too poor  
 too dark  
 too mestizo  
 too broken  
 from The Beast

When another man  
 betrays  
 sends them on birthdays  
 to murder capitals  
 rounds them up  
 like the murders  
 they fled  
 sends them back  
 on their birthdays  
 when 18 is a death sentence

I understand a hot sauce bat to a fire hydrant.  
 I grab my hot sauce bat to break down

**A wall**

**my people**

**will never pay for.**

But I am also a women who wants a bat  
 named catharsis.  
 catharsis meaning clarification.

**Clarification:**

I am a tidal wave.  
 Bey is a tidal wave.

**This poem is a tidal wave**

Crashing  
 over

Manhatitlan.<sup>1</sup>

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**NOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> Quoted from Beyoncé's *Lemonade* visual album.
- <sup>2</sup> Quoted from Beyoncé's *Lemonade* visual album.
- <sup>3</sup> Quoted from Beyoncé's *Lemonade* visual album.
- <sup>4</sup> Adapted from Edwidge Danticat's *Krik Krak*, 1995.
- <sup>5</sup> Adapted from Robert Hayden "Middle Passage", 1962.
- <sup>6</sup> Reference to Derrida in *Ghost Dance*, 1983.
- <sup>7</sup> Quoted from Beyoncé's *Lemonade* visual album.
- <sup>8</sup> Quoted from Beyoncé's *Lemonade* visual album.
- <sup>9</sup> Adapted from Robert Hayden "Middle Passage", 1962.
- <sup>10</sup> Quoted from Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, 1987.
- <sup>11</sup> Eminem "Bad Meets Evil"
- <sup>12</sup> Adapted from rupi kaur.
- <sup>13</sup> Adapted from Lucille Clifton "Homage to my Hips"
- <sup>14</sup> Quote from Zadie Smith
- <sup>14</sup> Reference to Maud Martha, by Gwendolyn Brooks.