

Foreword

I had the lesbian pleasure of being bullied by tatiana de la tierra.

This happened at a queer archive at the University of California, Los Angeles. I was celebrating the release of my first book, and I trembled at the podium while I read to a small audience about Chicana goths dyking out in the 90s.

I had never met tatiana and did not know what she looked like. I knew of her but didn't realize it was she who sat in the front row, staring at me. She wore a tie-dye t-shirt, a goddess necklace, and a facial expression that lacked amusement. Her stare made me feel targeted. Its gaze was unapologetic, impolite, and tightly pointed. These qualities concerned me. They also titillated me.

tatiana occupied a significant amount of space, she spilled off her folding chair and into the air, but it was her body language that communicated intent. Before me sat a stranger with premeditated purpose.

When my reading concluded, tatiana sprang from her chair. She bypassed my friends and acquaintances and made a beeline that brought us face to face. She stuck out her hand and held it inches from my hip.

"I am tatiana de la tierra," she announced haughtily.

I nodded and shook her hand, waiting for her to declare her mission.

"Um," she muttered. This tic showed a crack in her aggressive armor. "I wrote the book *For the Hard Ones*. You reviewed it for *Girlfriends Magazine*."

Ah! I thought to myself. *We are here for a reckoning!*

"Yes!" I agreed. I *had* written a critical review.

tatiana straightened her spine. "You gave the book...a B," she said. "I want to know...why a B?" She waited with a stern expression.

I smiled inwardly. "I only wrote the copy for the reviews. My editor assigned the letter grades. *She* chose the B."

tatiana relaxed into forgiveness. "Will you sign my book?" she asked and thrust my book at me.

"Sure," I answered, glancing up at her as I inscribed it.

As I handed back the book, I understood where I stood: in the presence of a perfectionist with huge balls.

Gradually, tatiana and I developed a friendship. I learned to associate courage with her. This virtue fueled tatiana's craft as well as many of her day-to-day choices. tatiana found writing *For the Hard Ones* challenging and the book, therefore, may be regarded as an epistemic experiment in queer courage.

As a lesbian phenomenologist, tatiana requires a tailored method of interpretation, a lesbian HERmeneutics. The following questions, to which I've proposed my own answers, might guide such an exegesis:

Q) Who is the lesbian author?

As she was known to bark in Spanish during roll calls: "¡tatiana de la tierra...presente!"

Q) What is the lesbian subject matter of the text?

First-lesbian (as opposed to first-person) consciousness

Q) Why did a lesbian write this text?

Curiosity, courage, and Sapphic eros inspired its authorship

Q) How did a lesbian compose this text?

By using her tongue as her pen

Q) When did a lesbian compose this text?

All lesbian events occur according to lesbian time

Q) In what lesbian place was this text written?

Texas

Q) By what lesbian means was this text published?

A) Lesbian scheming brought this text into the light.

tatiana's canon inspires a yonic, not phallic, reading. In her hands, language became hard, wet, soft and cleft. Sentences became surprise-filled cunts. To experience their surprises, one must be willing to treat cunts as mouths, interlocutors and oracles.

The tongue occupies an equally important place in tatiana's canon, it exists as the cunt's complement, and it holds an almost deified status as exemplified by the poem *Lengua Alabanza*: "All praise be to tongue..."

For the Hard Ones is structured according to tongue. tatiana translated each phenomenology from English to Spanish and this bilingual format mirrors the lesbian gender switching exhibited within the phenomenologies. The female abstractions that populate *For the Hard Ones* translate their lesbianism into femme or butch existences and this duality suggests the existence of two mother tongues that form, and propagate, a lesbian language family.

The accumulated effect of tongue references throughout tatiana's canon further underscores the primacy of bilingual experience. In some poems, tongues are forked. In other writings, Spanglish doubles the tongue by tripling it. tatiana dubbed the tongue "the lesbian mascot," and she packed her odes to it with sensual onomateopoeia that required those who read it aloud to perform oral gymnastics. tatiana's fertile treatment of the tongue insinuates infinity: we may fork the tongue over and over forever and still not run out of morphemes. Linguistic pleasure and challenge remain eternally ripe.

Myriam Gurba