

Bachianas

written by Guest Contributor | October 31, 2016

n that hole, in that **meat mirror**, on
/here I lie in solitude. And lower—to w
t arches. It swings. Yet the fall mos
his **meat**. And the avid **corpse** dares
e.

BACHIANAS Gloria Gervitz + Sarah Roth

he **opened thing** explodes. Give me re
e newborn. Give me refuge in this bur
this silence. Open me like a furrow. I
y tremor is a sacred begging? Green
loan. Thick vigil. Root. Thought of the

Is fear, perhaps, the highest? |

The poetess sits in a garden, writing into an accordion-bound notebook. It is night. It is a still night. Black willows and cottonwoods press against the walls of the garden, leaves of skin gleaming flatly in moonlight. As the poetess writes, furrows demarcate the skin of her back, thin and deep and curved, as if drawn by the filed tips of fingernails.

[Click here to view the entire PDF of this piece.](#)

ON BACHIANAS

Gloria Gervitz's *Bachianas* is typeset on thick, yellowed paper. Running my hands along the manuscript, the surface feels like papyrus. The poems are unbound. They were handed to me by chance.

The poems inherit their collective title from *Bachianas Brasileiras*, Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos's nine-suite orchestral composition. Villa-Lobos composed *Bachianas Brasileiras*—from 1930 to 1945—in an attempt to freely adapt Baroque contrapuntal procedures to Brazilian music. Villa-Lobos gave each suite two names: one "Bachian" (Preludio, Fuga, etc.) and the other Brazilian (Embolada, O canto da nossa terra, etc.)

Gervitz's *Bachianas* is a dyad: the rending "Surcos" and the cascading "drifting." In each, the persona's anguish bursts forth through a sequence of images that project the female body onto a violent, dynamic natural world.

In the hybrid space of this project, I peel back the skin of Gervitz's poems to taste their veins. I entwine this taste with their original poetic skin, creating a body of translational affect. This project is a transfusion, a quilt, a summoning, a séance of the living, a monster, a dance, a conversation.

ON TRANSLATION

Any act of translation is a metamorphosis: a "change of a form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one, by natural or supernatural means." To translate is to transform, to change shape.

Within the cocoon of translation, the cells of each poem have blended into slurry. Paused at the moment of translation, the word—stripped of its form—projects into an infinity of all possible meanings.

Take: "cáliz."

Enwrapped in threads, breaking down in clumps, dissolving into the pupa, "cáliz," spoken, is no longer "cáliz."

"Cáliz" is: goblet, cup, sacred goblet, chalice, calyx, stoup...

Each of these words unfold in infinite possibility of differentiation.

Goblet is: tumbler, cup, beaker, glass...

Calyx is: the sepals of a flower, typically forming a whorl that encloses the petals and forms a protective layer around a flower in bud. Compare with corolla.

Calyx is: a cuplike cavity or structure.

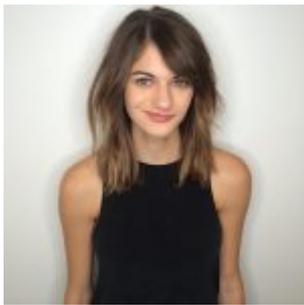
Calyx is: a portion of the pelvis of a mammalian kidney.

Calyx is: the plated body of a crinoid, excluding the stalk and arms.

It is said that, when given chemical stimuli as caterpillars, later, after emergence from the cocoon, moths will “remember” these stimuli.

I seek to capture the moments when, as moths, creatures recollect the miasmic space of the pupa; to render the moment when moths have just grown wings, yet are still part-miasma.

Gloria Gervitz is the author of two collections of poetry, *Fragmento de Ventana* and *Migraciones*. Her poetry has been featured in a number of Spanish-language, English-language, and bilingual publications, including *Diálogos: Artes, Letras, Ciencias Humanas; Hispamérica*; and *The Antioch Review*. Gloria is currently living and writing in San Diego, CA.



Sarah Roth is a writer and translator interested in the politics of testimony. She received an MFA in Creative Writing from University of Notre Dame and a BA in Sustainable Development from Washington University in St. Louis. Sarah’s work can be found in *Spires*, *The Bend*, and *Jewish Responses to Persecution: 1944-1946*.