GRACIAS MUJER

● TAMARA VALDIVIA PARIONA
● University of Toronto

ABSTRACT

Throughout my life, my relationship to womanhood has been an ever-changing phenomenon. In reflecting on the instances that have come to define this relationship, I wrote “Gracias Mujer,” an homage to the women who have shaped my womanhood and a simultaneous rejection of all that has burdened me. In light of the gendered dynamics within Latino culture, this piece reflects on my complex relationship with my parents and my desire to find healing from personal experiences. Incorporating themes of womanhood, memory, childhood, and family, “Gracias Mujer” is an acknowledgement of my traumas, a love letter to my mother, and a validation of my desires as a Latina woman within an often-confined space. In this poem, without romanticizing them, I try to honour the sacrifices the women and ancestors in my life have had to make, expressing a gratitude for their contribution to my personhood, but also explicitly stating that the trauma that has resulted stops within me.

KEYWORDS

womanhood, family,
childhood and memory,
Latinidad

There are days I think about what it means to be a mother
To sacrifice everything for your child, to be their silent protector,
Ever-giving, for better or for worse
There are days I reflect on what it meant to be a child, to
pretend not to notice,
to both fear and resent and to silently try to understand
These are the days I sit in conversation with my sister,
reminiscing about our contradictory home,
Memories of affection coming in large tides, but a healing that
is unable to ever reach the shore
Every day I think about what it means to be una mujer,
to never speak about things that must not be heard
To silently mourn the depths of your wantings
These are the days when all the women inside me are
exhausted and all the men ever- raging,
Both tired of feeling so heavy
I want the best of my father and mother
A familiar courage without an unpredictable rage,
A willingness to love without a sacrificial ache
My mother always used to say to me,

pidele a la virgen mihijita, ella te absolvera de tu dolor,
 pray to the virgin my child she'll absolve you from your hurt
 But what does it mean, when all the women I look to for
 comfort are adorned by their pain?
 In the rural villages of Peru, you can find statues of Maria
 holding her dead crucified son in her arms,
 a permanent expression of grief and pain on her face
 In a place where historic structures of power
 rule death rampant,
 a loss of child, a husband, is not uncommon
 These statues offer comfort to indigenous Quechua women,
 A valorization of their hurt
 Strength and suffering, interchangeable words, in my
 history and in my home
 I thank the women inside me for their laboured strength,
 Gracias Mujer
 Recognizing I am ready to accept that I've always wanted more

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A special thanks to Mia Sanders for their constant encouragement, friendship, and faith.

AUTHOR BIO

Tamara Valdivia Pariona is a Peruvian Woman currently pursuing an undergraduate degree in Latin American Studies. She plans on following a career in community and service work with a focus on Latin American refugees and the Latin American diaspora. Her biggest inspirations are her mother, her grandmother and Nina Simone.