

Here Lies **LALO**



The Collected Poems of
ABELARDO DELGADO

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EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION, BY

JARICA LINN WATTS

FOREWORD BY ARTURO J. ALDAMA



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Recovering the past, creating the future

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Abelardo, 1931-2004.

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For my parents and Jessi Rose.

For Clint and my Saylor, whose scribbles
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PREFATORY NOTE

LALO DELGADO'S POETRY GAVE WORDS TO THE LIFE AND SUFFERING OF THE farmworkers, Chicanos, Mexicanos in an irreverent, artful often humorous voice. His life's experience in the Southwest covered the human landscape of social survival by the oppressed and their activism to make changes. He shines a clear poetic light to identify the specific issues that cause pain and discrimination by those that are unaware of how their actions hurt others.

Lalo always leaves the reader with hope and love; by reading his poetry and shared wisdom one is not only educated but uplifted.

—*Dolores Huerta*

FOREWORD

Abelardo Lalo Delgado
Que en paz descanse

A CHICANA AND CHICANO CULTURAL AND LITERARY RENAISSANCE OPENED A vibrancy of literary, performative and visual empowerment that went hand in hand with the Chicano movement for social justice, equal rights and struggles for farm worker, educational and political empowerment. Denver and Colorado serve as a nexus point of the Chicana and Chicano movement, where artists, activists, students, families and workers rose up and said *ya basta* to institutionalized practices that degrade the cultural plurality of Chicanas and Chicanos and all those of Mexican descent in the United States. Lalo Delgado, having immigrated here from northern Mexico, felt first-hand the rule of Anglo-centrism race and class oppression, segregation, poverty and discrimination based on language, skin color, national origin and cultural difference. Lalo, rather than allowing his inner voice to become humiliated and sterilized by the imposition of monolingual hegemonies, spoke back, wrote back and celebrated his borderland identity, and articulated his deep felt convictions in the power of solidarity and group struggle and the power of collective cultural *dignidad*. Miriam Bornstein-Somoza's article, "Pedagogical Practices of Liberation in Abelardo 'Lalo' Delgado's Movement Poetry,"¹ looks at Lalo's poetic corpus of fourteen published works to argue that his poetic discourse contributes to an active pedagogy

¹See Miriam Bornstein-Somoza, "Pedagogical Practices of Liberation in Abelardo 'Lalo' Delgado's Movement Poetry" Ed. Aldama, Facio, Maeda, Rabaka, *Enduring Legacies of the Colorado Borderlands* (Boulder: UP of Colorado, 2011). 327–345.

of oppressed Chicana/o peoples. Specifically, Bornstein-Somoza argues that in Delgado's poetic discourse:

Chicanos/as become subjects of their particular historical moment as relations between dominant and marginalized or sub-altern communities are altered. He does not expect the dominant culture to authorize him since he authorizes himself in order to create a voice that gives meaning to the representative function of the word. (222)

In having Chicanas/os become subjects of their historic moment and agents of our language, Delgado takes seriously the artistic legacies of Mesoamerica, and enters in the Xochitl Cuicatl flor y canto (flower and song) traditions of the Aztec or Mexica past, bringing them into a heteroglossic neocolonial present. His poetry reflects the indigeneity of Chicanas and Chicanos, and honors the struggle for cultural and linguistic pluralities of the US and México borderlands. His impressive corpus of published work plays a central role to what poet and theorist Alfred Arteaga calls poetic language of the Chicana and Chicano community²:

Language itself, the very fabric of the poem, is significant in the delineation of the homeland and its people. Poetic language is particularly to the task of myth, to envisioning a national origin, and to the tasks of defining a people, their place on the planet, and their future. (17)

On a personal note, when I was asked to write this foreword, I was deeply humbled and in awe of how one human being and his infectious struggle to have a voice has touched the lives of generations of people in all walks of life, from young children to elders. He is remembered as a gentle spirit who was driven by indomitable kindness and a militant *respeto* for the unique creative potential of every person he interacted with. He is remembered for being a selfless and truly organic intellectual, and a fighter for the creative and educational rights of a community that continues to stand against an entrenched and ongoing system of intentional disenfranchisement. Helen

²See Alfred Arteaga, *Chicano Poetics: Heterotexts and Hybridities* (Cambridge UP, 1997). 17.

Girón, a Chicano Studies professor at Denver Metro and longtime community activist and close friend of Lalo's for over 20 years, remembers his charisma and community-building spirit: "... as a young girl (23 or so) I worked for the United Farm Workers Union here in Denver for \$5 a week. Many times the picket lines were attacked by the Klan. . . . This always made me so fearful. However, when I watched Lalo speak or take on issues, and how to be courageous even in the darkest moments, it gave me the strength to continue on the picket lines and even face arrest."

The poem below written at Lalo's funeral and public mourning ceremony by another longtime *compañero* also gives testimony to Lalo whom he calls the "humble poet laureate de Aztlán" and the "grandfather to generations of Chicano poets who dared to pick up the pen."

LALO'S VELORIO

Here lies *Don Abelardo Delgado*
humble poet laureate *de Aztlán*
a hero to those who till the soil
trabajadores whose hands
have become warped and decryped
making *masa* made of *tierra*
for *los ricos de América*. Lalo
freedom fighter for *los de abajo*
grandfather to the generations
of Chicano poets who dared to pick up
the pen, crafting images *de una vida dura*
pero también llena de esperanza.

—*Ramón del Castillo*

Chair of Chicana and Chicano Studies,
Metropolitan State College, Denver, CO

In conclusion: His physical body might be gone, his spirit has journeyed to Mictlán, yet the body of his poetic spirit lives on in the communal memory of *la gente*.

Please read the following book, be inspired, challenged and mesmerized, and gain courage to fight for your creative truths.