



Voices from the Gaps *Throwing Fire at the Sun, Water at the Moon*

Throwing Fire at the Sun, Water at the Moon, Anita Endrezze's third book, tells her family history through a complex and skillfully-woven web of political theorizing, historical fact, short stories, and poetry. Born in California to a full-blooded Yaqui Indian father and European mother, Endrezze explores the Native side of her family history, and the history of the Yaqui people as a whole.

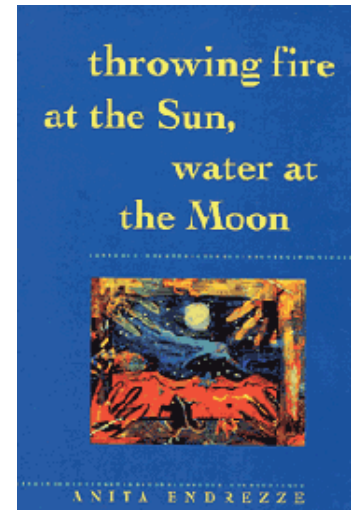
In addition to doing extensive academic research on the history of the Yaqui people, Endrezze also made a journey to Sonora, Mexico, in preparation for this book. Searching out distant relatives and talking to those closer to her as well as other Yaqui people, she listened to ancient stories re-told by elders and learned the old ways of her people.

Personal and historical context are given to the book before it even starts in "A Journey to the Heart," an introduction in which Endrezze states: "In gathering material for this book I learned that the truth is not often found in fact. The reporting of history is always subjective, no matter who is telling it. This discovery freed me: I was able to figure out how I wanted to approach my family history - as fact or fiction? Long troubled by the question, I decided to do it both ways."

This book therefore, is history, myth, family anecdotes, poetry, and short stories, and they are all the same thing. Indeed, the book does weave in and out of poetry and prose, textbook-like historical fact and traditional Yaqui storytelling. For example, "Indian Vices" starts out with an excerpt from the journal of a Spanish missionary who traveled in Sonora in the mid-1700s and quickly goes into poem form, using prose-like language:

By nature Indians are very lazy and sworn enemies of work. They prefer to suffer hunger than to fatigue themselves with agriculture. Therefore, they must be forced to do this by their superiors. With six industrious Europeans one can do more in one day than fifty Indians.

— Joseph Och, *Missionary in Sonora: Travel Reports of Joseph Och, S.J. , 1755-1767*



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Mining: The Indian is naked, swinging quarter to half hundredweight steel-edged crowbars. He climbs beams with notches set step by step, carrying ore in plaited baskets on his shoulders. They are given one half-bushel of maize per week. This is their payment unless they have a family — then they are given two half-bushels. Two men using wheelbarrows could haul out more than thirty lazy Indians working an entire day.
— Endrezze 83

As can be seen by this example, Endrezze does an excellent job of holding different styles together. She does this mainly through the use of common themes. Ranging from the roles and experiences of women within Yaqui society and the tragic conquest of that society, to witches and goddesses, female-incarnate coyotes and talking trees, these common themes are all interwoven throughout the book by appearing simultaneously within one piece and from one to the next.

Far from confusing the reader, the appearance and disappearance of these themes gives the book a sense of congruence and solidity. The book is divided into two parts: Part One, “In the Navel of the Moon: Mexico” focuses mainly on historical information, traditional Yaqui stories and political theory. Lines of poetry are inserted within pieces containing mostly textbook-like historical information on Yaqui ways, traditions, and interactions with the Spanish conquistadors.

The traditional Yaqui stories vary in subject from the origins of life, such as in “Coatlicue: An Aztec Creation Story in Two Versions,” to the importance of women in Yaqui history and society as in “The Flower Women” and “The Female Soul of Mexico,” to magical tales of people who can shapeshift into snakes in “The Snake People,” women who turn into coyotes in “Coyote-Woman” and giants in “The Woman Who Measured Yaqui Country.”

Part Two of the book is titled, “Cuentos de Mi Familia / Stories of My Family,” and it is exactly that. The second part of the book moves away from the general history and political theorizing of the first part into personal stories of Endrezze’s own family. Some are fact, some are fiction, and some a blend of both. Endrezze blends traditional Yaqui stories about the origins of life and gods and goddesses with anecdotes from her own family.



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Endrezze creates a blend of fact and fiction and past and present that is extremely fluid. “Grandfather Sun Falls in Love with a Moon-Faced Woman” is a perfect example of this blend. The piece is based on an old Yaqui story about the sun and the moon, but Endrezze replaces the main characters with her own grandparents and incorporates their real-life stories into it.

In Endrezze’s version of the story, when the Grandfather realizes he can’t have the magical Moon Woman, he marries the Grandmother but he still pines away for Moon Woman until he dies:

He got married. To an ordinary, beautiful Yaqui woman. One who was smart with money and took care of him and the children. A really good woman, with another child born before his. Angelita. A little angel. Not his wife’s fault she was raped, but she loved the girl. . . .

S, so he was married. But he never stopped mooning for her.

When the car came out of the night, he was Sun, hot and feeling the blood pounding in his feet. He danced in the street, watching the headlights give him a stage. He bent over, waiting for the applause, bottle in one hand. It was a magic bottle, like the kind in the stories from Arabia, where a tiny spirit lived inside and gave you whatever you wished. He kept her there and drank until he got what he wanted. It took him a long time to figure out what that was.

So when the car hit him, he thought it was love again. A big punch to the solar plexus

A real jab to the heart. (Endrezze 121)

Another blend of Endrezze’s family stories with those of the ancient Yaqui is told in “Estefana’s Necklace of Bullets.” Other pieces in the second half of the book, such as “My Little Sister’s Heart in My Hands” and “The Other Story,” tell the truths, good and bad, about Endrezze’s immediate family in poem form. Also included at the end of the book are her own original painting which she includes as another form of media to continue the telling of her stories. All of Endrezze’s styles and formats are woven together wonderfully and carefully. *Throwing Fire at the Sun, Water at the Moon* is a beautiful fabric held tightly, yet delicately together by a common thread of themes.

Reviewed by Misty Farrell