

Young poet wins Utah's top prize for original work in Spanish

12/14/2018

Carlos Andres Gutierrez Gutierrez, a sophomore majoring in Spanish, earned the state's top award for original writing in Spanish. He received the Sor Juana Award, part of the Utah Book Awards sponsored by Utah Humanities.

To read Carlos Gutierrez Gutierrez's winning poem, "Tu Sombra," scroll down to bottom of the story.

As the winner of a prestigious, statewide writing contest, sophomore Carlos Andres Gutierrez Gutierrez is rethinking his future.

Now, he sees a future in which he can be a voice for other young people like himself: those living somewhere between the cultures of America and Latin America.

In October, the 19-year-old accepted the Sor Juana Award, a Utah Humanities statewide prize for original writing in Spanish. The award, now in its sixth year, was established by the arts advocacy organization Artes de Mexico en Utah before being incorporated into the Utah Book Awards.

"I wasn't expecting to win the contest or even participate because my poetry is, like, my own thing," said Carlos, who won for his original poem, "Tu Sombra (Your Shadow)." "I never expected people to be interested in it."

Carlos Gutierrez Gutierrez, now a sophomore majoring in Spanish and minoring in Political Science, came to the United States with his mother as an 11-year-old.

He was soon working in the fields of California's Imperial Valley. His teenager's schedule was grueling: at 3 a.m. daily he arrived for work in the fields, at 6 a.m. he hurried to school, and, after school, he headed to a second job cleaning houses. He did that for four years.

By 2014, however, such jobs were becoming scarcer, and Carlos, and he and his mother moved to West Valley City. He graduated from Taylorsville High two years later and transferred to Utah State University. At USU, he registered

in a major that seemed familiar to him: civil engineering. "I used to work in construction with my dad," he says. "I was always involved in construction, wood working, plumbing, and electricity."

Then, he met JP Spicer Escalante, a professor of Spanish in the Department of Language, Philosophy and Communication Studies. Spicer Escalante, says Carlos, "introduced me to the world of Spanish literature."

His dreams of an engineering career were upgraded to a future as an academic, perhaps a professor who is able to "promote a love for the language and the culture to other people," he said.

Especially revealing, Carlos says, was his discovery of great writers who expressed all sorts of truths in their native Spanish.

"I tried to get my head around the classics like Shakespeare or Voltaire," he said. "But they had their own voice of speaking to the people they were writing for."

Soon, he was reading works in Spanish by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Jorge Luis Borges and "even classical literature like Cervantes," he said. "I began to really feel this connection with books. And now, I just can't stop reading."

Poetry, particularly, he said, doesn't endure translation well and needs to be read in its original script. He explains, "Reading something originally intended to be read in one language loses a lot of meaning when it's translated."

One's heritage language is also a richer ground for expressing intense, deep-seated emotions. Those were the very feelings that first prompted Carlos to draft a few lines of prose as a high school senior. Ah, heartbreak. Fortunately, the experience was, he adds, "my beginner's steps into poetry."

Now he agrees with another favorite author, Carlos Fuentes. "He said he writes particularly in Spanish because that's the language in which he loves, he hates, he curses," said Carlos. "It's the language that identifies him the most."

Professor Spicer Escalante said Carlos had distinguished himself by his "tremendous drive to learn and grow."

The sophomore, adds Spicer Escalante, "reads voraciously and has a unique ability to recognize where he needs to fill in gaps when he lacks context, theory or general knowledge."

Carlos' winning poem, "Tu Sombre (Your Shadow)," describes the enigmatic attraction of a shadow that visits during the day and disappears at night. The poem's poetic voice, said Carlos, "talks to the shadow and says, 'I can only see your silhouette. I can't hold you, I can't approach you, I can't be emotionally attached to you. And then eventually you disappear when the sun sets.'" The poem's theme is the comparison of a human's seemingly immortal life to one that is so transient, he said.

In his accomplishment, Carlos sees an opportunity, even a responsibility, to be a voice for others torn between two cultures. It's a demographic that hasn't had a representative spokesperson, he believes. And he understands that for others, like himself, "being an American is more complex than just being from the U.S."

He excited about the growing, flowing and changing movement of young Hispanics seeking to find their own distinct voices in American politics and culture. The movement, he says, has also swept in Latino LGBT voices and more or less solidified into a community now known as LatinX.

"It feels like LatinX is its own movement now," he says. "There's this new wave of identities coming upon us."

Carlos' mentor, Professor Spicer Escalante, sees Carlos as a new voice that will indeed contribute to all communities. "He is, indeed, a true diamond in the rough who has an excellent future ahead of him," he said.

él te enmarca por un último santiamén en mi cama, en el momento en que llega a su ocaso. Justo cuando caigo rendido a la demencia de la ilusión, me arrojé hasta tus cercanías. Paso los segundos buscándote. Sin más remedio que encontrarte. Justo cuando llego a tus piernas, desapareces de pies a cabeza. Y que al rapaz viento de la cortina y su movimiento; una mujer desaparecida y durante todas las amanecidas: regresa a darme los buenos días.

Vuelves al amanecer. Al despertar. Vuelves a una cama vacía. A una vida sin ilusiones. Sin emociones. Sin complicaciones. Vienes, para postrarte en mi cama, una cama fría y a la vez implacable de relaciones humanas. Buscas el inicio a una vida efímera, que solo dura 43,200 segundos. Todos ya pasaron; y pasaran.

Me he convertido en la Dido de mi propio imperio de arena, mientras que el tiempo me desgarró a mi Eneas y solo sucumbo a una desesperada acción de matarife.

Porque el tiempo tuyo es de una vida.

¿El mío?

El de un día...

Tu Sombra

By Carlos Andres Gutierrez Gutierrez

Miro tu sombra. Miro como se corre tu sombra en el suave aleteo de las cortinas. El reflejo de un cuerpo taciturno que solo flota, y callado, grita a mi llamado. Te agrandas y te achicas con el sombrío movimiento del viento, como si tu cuerpo no tuviese límites. Traspasas los filtros de conciencia y tu contorno luminoso aterriza a mis pies. De ahí, tu sombra se limita a contraerse hasta llegar a su punto de partida. Levantas los brazos en signo de rendición mientras yo solo puedo, si no, soñar con abrazar tu sombra. Una silueta negra que baila un *raqs sharqi* al estilo de un tango; un danzón; un bolero.

Una piel descubierta transformada en lienzo precioso, que revela emociones: como una Madame de Pompadour pintada en el renacimiento italiano. Me acerco a ti, y te alejas. Te alejas junto con el sol: ¡sol castigador! Un sol que no hace más que hacerme heridas internas cuando