



In an Angry Season (Camino del Sol)

Lisa D. Chávez

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A white woman navigates her fear and uncertainty to learn the ways of the people she called savages, until she begins to dream “in Dakota, syllables sliding / on my tongue like tender pieces of meat.” An African man, on display as a cannibal at the World’s Columbian Exposition in 1893, sees into the future: “humiliations heaped up / as on overfilled plates . . . / . . . a country that casually / consumes its own.” A woman holds the gray-blue barrel of a gun in her mouth, “the taste familiar / as her own blood.”

With an unexcelled command of narrative verse, Lisa Chávez tells the stories of American lives across more than a century. Whether retelling nineteenth-century captivity narratives or depicting contemporary American women confronting addiction and despair, Chávez investigates issues of identity and self-definition in the face of an often harsh and unremitting history.

Her story-poems explore the ways in which people have been made captive—whether to racism or national policy, to bad marriages or alcoholism, to poverty or emotion—from the Inuit woman birthing a son among strangers to the wife now deranged by desire for another man: “He’s the smoky slow-burn of chipotle on the tongue. My golden idol. My gospel revival. He’s hashish sweet and languorous—my body’s one desire.”

In the end, Chávez shows us a New World of promise in which an alchemist’s assistant summons stories from stones by calling their names with “clicks of her tongue, / syllables of silver, turquoise, and jade,” and a Native woman discovers her true power in an Alaskan bar. Passionate and political, *In an Angry Season* is a work of startling depth and breadth—an American history in poetry—that asks us what it means to be civilized.

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