

# LUIS ALBERTO URREA

*fuller award for lifetime achievement*

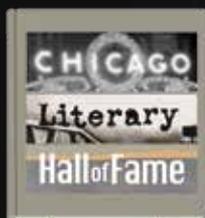
**October 28, 2021**

**6:00 - 7:30 p.m.**

**National Museum  
of Mexican Art**

1852 W. 19th Street  
Chicago, IL 60608

Presented by



Painting by Gregorio Mejia

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*“Both of my parents, having fallen on dire straits, didn’t want me to be a dreamer; they wanted me to be practical, but I couldn’t do it.”*

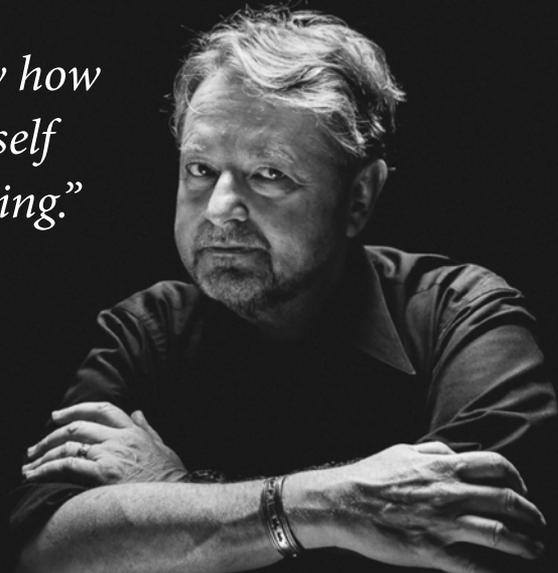
Luis 6 weeks old (Tijuana '55)



# TONIGHT'S PROGRAM

Carlos Tortolero	Welcome to The National Museum of Mexican Art
Donald G. Evans	About the Fuller Award
Rick Najera	Our Emcee
Dave Eggers	Video Tribute
Sara Paretsky	Tribute
Laura Crotte	Performing a Collage of Urrea Characters
Daniel Borzutzky	Tribute
Roberta Rubin	Presenting the Fuller Award for lifetime achievement
Luis Alberto Urrea	Acceptance Speech
Coya Paz & Luis Alberto Urrea	In Conversation
Donald G. Evans	Closing

*“I didn’t know how  
to express myself  
except in writing.”*



# THE FULLER AWARD

By Valya Dudycz Lupescu

“The Fuller” is awarded by the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame to a Chicago author who has made an outstanding lifetime contribution to literature. The first ten Fuller Awards were presented to Gene Wolfe (2012), Harry Mark Petrakis (2014), Haki Madhubuti (2015), Rosellen Brown (2016), Angela Jackson (2018), Stuart Dybek (2018), Sara Paretsky (2019), Sterling Plump (2019), Sandra Cisneros (2021), and Reginald Gibbons (2021).

With the passing of Wolfe in 2019 and Petrakis earlier this year, the CLHOF established a policy of elevating all Fuller Award winners to induction status, pending board approval. Both Wolfe and Petrakis will be inducted into the CLHOF later this year.

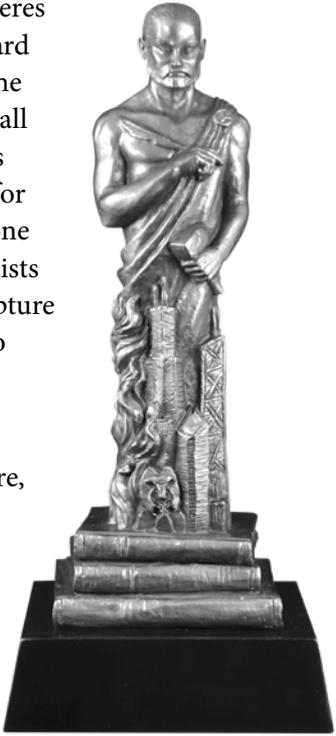
## **The Fuller Legacy: A Quick Look at a Literary Pioneer**

The award was inspired by the literary contribution of 2017 CLHOF inductee Henry Blake Fuller, one of Chicago’s earliest novelists and author of *The Cliff-Dwellers* and *With the Procession*. Both novels use the rapidly developing city of Chicago as their setting and are considered by many to be the earliest examples of American realism. Theodore Dreiser called *With the Procession* the first piece of American realism that he had encountered and considered it the best of the school, even during the days of his own prominence. There are additional layers of meaning to the word “fuller.” A fuller is also a tool used to form metal when it’s hot, an important part of building and a nice metaphor for Chicago, home to the “First Chicago School” of architecture that rose up from the ashes of the Chicago Fire of 1871. Between 1872 and 1879, more than ten thousand construction permits were issued. Chicago emerged as a resilient city that took risks and made bold decisions—using iron and steel to frame its buildings, giving rise to the world’s first skyscraper. The fuller was one such tool that made it happen, a symbol of possibility and perseverance. Inspired by the sleek lines and Art Deco style of Chicago

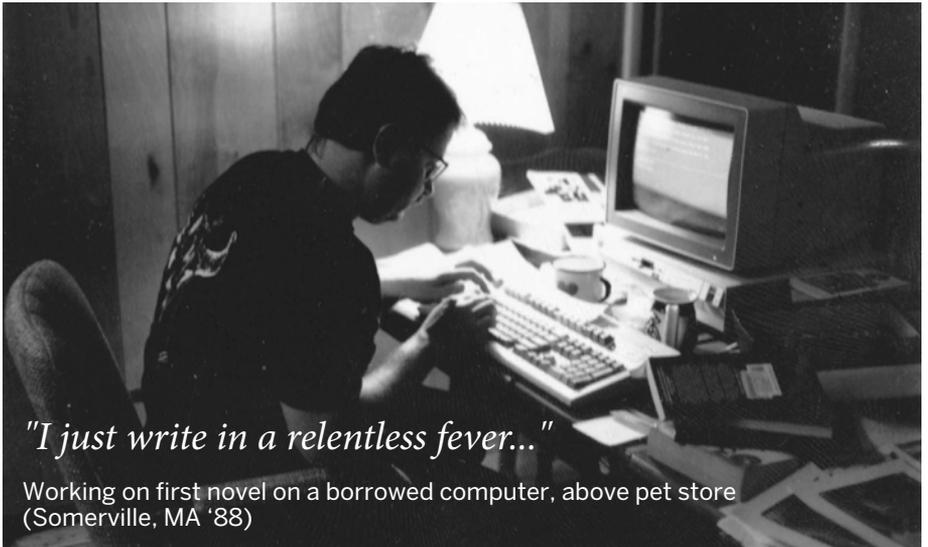


sculptor John Bradley Storrs, whose sculpture Ceres is on top of the Board of Trade building, the award statue for the Fuller was based on Hephaestus, the Greek god of the blacksmith's fire and patron of all craftsmen. According to legend, Hephaestus was the only god who worked, and he was honored for having taught mankind that work is noble and one should excel at his or her craft. The patron of artists and craftsmen, he seemed a fitting symbol to capture the spirit of excellence embodied by the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame's Fuller Award.

Ron Swanson, Jr., who created the Fuller Award statue, is the founder and owner of R.E. Sculpture, Inc. Over the course of his career, Ron has worked on large sculptures, including public figures as part of an artist group at Friends of Community Public Art in Joliet. He has also worked on many original toy prototypes and various licensed character sculpts.



[www.resculpture.net](http://www.resculpture.net)



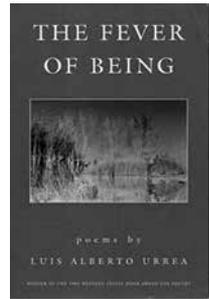
*"I just write in a relentless fever.."*

Working on first novel on a borrowed computer, above pet store  
(Somerville, MA '88)

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

## Poetry

- *The Fever of Being*. West End Press. 1994.
- *Ghost Sickness*. Cinco Puntos Press. 1997.
- *Vatos*. José Galvez (photog.). Cinco Puntos Press. 2000.
- *Tijuana Book of the Dead*. Soft Skull Press. 2015.

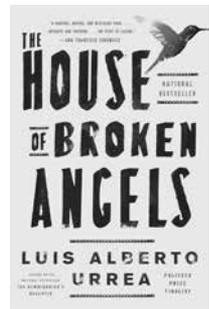


## Short Stories

- *Six Kinds of Sky*. Cinco Puntos Press. 2002.
- *Mr. Mendoza's Paintbrush*. Christopher Cardinale (artwork). Graphic Novel. Cinco Puntos Press. 2010.
- *The Water Museum*. Little, Brown and Company. 2015.

## Novels

- *In Search of Snow*. University of Arizona Press. 1994.
- *The Hummingbird's Daughter*. Little, Brown and Company. 2005.
- *Into the Beautiful North*. Little, Brown and Company. 2009.
- *Queen of America*. Little, Brown and Company. 2011.
- *The House of Broken Angels*. Little, Brown and Company. 2018.

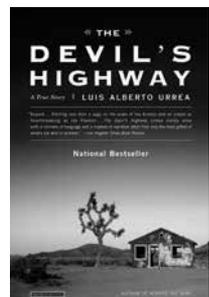


## Memoirs

- *Nobody's Son: Notes from an American Life*. University of Arizona Press. 1998.
- *Wandering Time: Western Notebooks*. University of Arizona Press. 1999.

## Non-Fiction

- *Across the Wire: Life and Hard Times on the Mexican Border*. John Lueders-Booth (photog.). Anchor Books. 1993.
- *By the Lake of Sleeping Children*. Anchor Books. 1996.
- *The Devil's Highway*. Little, Brown and Company. 2004.



# AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

Christopher Award 1994

Colorado Book Award in poetry 1994

Western States Book Award in poetry 1994

American Book Award 1999

Latino Literature Hall of Fame 2000

Small-press Book of the Year in fiction 2002

Lannan Literary Award 2004

Border Regional Library Association's Southwest Book Award 2004

Pulitzer Prize Finalist for non-fiction 2005

Kiriyama International Literary Prize 2006

Edgar Award for best mystery short story 2010

PEN-Faulkner Award Finalist 2016

American Academy of Arts and Letters Fiction Award 2017

National Book Critics Circle Award Finalist for fiction 2018

Guggenheim Fellowship 2019

Tucson Festival of Books Founders Award 2019

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*“She heard a hum above her head. She looked up: a hummingbird made of sky came down from the heavens. It was too small to be seen, yet she could see it. Its blue breast reflected the world as it descended. Its wings were white, made of writing. Although she did not have the words, she recognized them. The hummingbird’s wings had been written with a quill pen.”*

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# TONIGHT'S PARTICIPANTS



**Daniel Borzutzky** is the author of *Written After a Massacre in the Year 2018* (Coffee House Press, 2021); *Lake Michigan*, finalist for the 2019 Griffin International Poetry Prize; and *The Performance of Becoming Human*, which received the 2016 National Book Award. His other books include *In the Murmurs of the Rotten Carcass Economy*; *Memories of my Overdevelopment*; and *The Book of Interfering Bodies*. His translation of Galo Ghigliotto's *Valdivia* received the 2017 ALTA National Translation Award. He has translated Raúl Zurita's *The Country of Planks* and *Song for his Disappeared Love*, and Jaime Luis Huenún's *Port Trakl*. He teaches in the English and Latin American and Latino Studies Departments at the University of Illinois at Chicago.



**Laura Crotte**, a native of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, worked in performing arts for a creative decade in Veracruz and for over twenty years in Chicago. She is a union theatre actress, solo performer, stage director, deviser of multidisciplinary experiences, vocalist, and educator. Her theatre, film and radio performances as well as her own creative work have been featured in Chicago, Denver, Milwaukee, Cuzco, Buenos Aires, La Havana, Montreal and throughout Mexico. Ms. Crotte has worked as an educator in Arts and Culture, Parent Engagement, Early Learning, and Non-Verbal Communication. She has facilitated numerous bi-national cultural exchanges with scholars, community organizers, and artists. She was incredibly honored to perform in one of the four national productions of a theater adaptation of *Into the Beautiful North*.



**Donald G. Evans** is the author of three books, most recently the story collection *An Off-White Christmas*, and Founding Executive Director of the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame.



**Dave Eggers** is the author of many books, among them *The Circle*, *The Monk of Mokha*, *A Hologram for the King*, *What Is the What*, and *The Museum of Rain*. He is the cofounder of 826 National, a network of youth writing centers, and of Voice of Witness, an oral history book series that illuminates the stories of those impacted by human rights crises. He has been a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award, and is the recipient of the Dayton Literary Peace Prize and the American Book Award. He grew up in the Chicago suburbs, and graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He and his wife, the novelist Vendela Vida, live in the San Francisco Bay Area with their two children.



**Roberta Rubin** was an independent bookseller for nearly 40 years, as owner of Chestnut Court Bookshop, later the Book Stall at Chestnut Court in Winnetka, which was named one of the top 10 bookstores in America by USA Today and Publishers Weekly Bookstore of the Year. Roberta started successful book clubs at the store and alternated with Mary Dempsey in doing four-minute book talks on WFMT. She was instrumental in getting New York publishers to bring authors to Chicago and built large audiences in the Standard Club, Union League Club, University Club, and others of the downtown clubs. More recently, she has been a major force in bringing the American Writers Museum to Chicago, served as chair of its board, and was recognized for her efforts and largesse with the Roberta Rubin room at the museum. She has been involved with numerous boards and philanthropic activities.



**Rick Najera** is a screenwriter, actor, director, producer, sketch comedian, author, playwright, coach and national speaker with an expansive portfolio of credits in all forms of entertainment. He has received numerous industry awards for his work. From starring in films with Sidney Poitier, George Clooney and most recently Mario Lopez, to writing sketch comedy for Jim Carrey and Jamie Foxx, Najera is best known for starring on Broadway in his award-winning, self-penned stage play “Latinologues,” directed by comedy legend Cheech Marin. Najera is only one of three Latinos to ever write and star in their own play on Broadway.

As a screenwriter, Najera has written dozens of scripts for TV, film and the stage, starting out as a staff writer on the groundbreaking urban comedy series, *In Living Color*, for which he wrote more than 30 episodes. He is a national speaker and coach (Google, The World Bank, CNN, Harvard, UCLA, more) addressing themes such as diversity, entertainment, motivation, Hispanic market, politics and comedy. He is also the host of his new podcast, *Najera in America*, a comedic look at the news and interviews with change makers, produced by reVolver Podcasts and Cohesive Entertainment Group.

Najera is the author of four books: *Latins Anonymous*, *Pain of the Macho*, *Latinologues on Broadway* and *Almost White: Forced Confessions of a Latino in Hollywood*. He is currently writing his fifth book, *The Seven Laws to Mastering Writing and Speaking* with Harvard Medical School’s Dr. Sanjiv Chopra, brother of renowned spiritual guru and author, Deepak Chopra.



**Sara Paretsky** transformed the mystery world in 1982 with the introduction of private eye V. I. Warshawski in *Indemnity Only*. She and V. I.—tough, credible, street-smart *and* feminine—challenged the stereotypes of women in fiction as victims or vamps. Paretsky’s V.I. made it possible for a new generation of crime writers and fighters to thrive. Paretsky has been awarded both the Cartier Diamond Dagger and MWA’s Grand Master. In 2012, she received the Harold Washington Literary Award, whose previous winners include Saul Bellow and Margaret Atwood. Today Paretsky’s books are published in 30 countries.



**Coya Paz** (she/her) is a writer, director, and lip gloss connoisseur who was raised in Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, and the United States. She is the Artistic Director of Free Street Theater, which has been using performance to challenge Chicago's racial and economic segregation since 1969. Coya is an Associate Professor in The Theatre School at DePaul University, and is serving as the school's Interim Dean for the 2021-2022 school year. She is the co-author (with Chloe Johnston) of *Ensemble-Made Chicago: A Guide to Devised Theater*. Above all, she believes in the power of poetry and performance to build community to work towards social change.



**Carlos Tortolero** is the Founder and President of the National Museum of Mexican Art (NMMA) in Chicago, the only accredited Latino museum in the U.S. He founded the museum in 1982, and the museum opened its doors in 1987. From 1975-1987, Tortolero worked as a teacher, counselor, and administrator in the Chicago Public School System. He is a Co-Founder of the Chicago Latino Theater Alliance and serves on the board.

Tortolero has won numerous awards for his work including the Ohtli Award, which is the highest honor given by the Secretary of Foreign Relations of Mexico to individuals "Who have distinguished themselves in the services of the Mexican community outside of Mexico." He was named by the Chicago Sun-Times as one of the 200 most prominent Illinoisans in 200 years of history, and was awarded the City of Chicago's highest honor in the arts – The Fifth Star Award.

Tortolero has written for several books as well as numerous articles for national and international publications. He has taught classes at University of Illinois at Chicago, The School of the Art Institute, and Northwestern University. Tortolero has a B.A. in Secondary Education and History from the University of Illinois at Chicago and a M.A. in Bilingual Education Supervision from Chicago State University.

# **LUIS ALBERTO URREA: THE CRY OF HEAVEN**

By Donald G. Evans

Children love Luis Alberto Urrea. So do old people. Serious academics and genre readers. Mexicans and Americans of all stripes. Seventeen books into an illustrious career, Luis has published something for everybody. But it's more than that:

He is a voice of compassion in a world that needs it. He is a performer with an actor's presence, a comic's timing, and a musician's energy. He and the audience are going through an experience together. He moves into ideas and emotions as naturally as he sets up a joke, and makes it clear, in his literature and his life, that crying and laughing are equally powerful. He sees differences as interesting and inevitable, not threatening or inferior.

A few years ago, walking the streets of Salzburg, Austria during a family vacation, Luis tried to impress upon his daughter Rosario how a writer can't be sidetracked by money or fame, that it has to be about the work. At that very moment, a voice shouted from across the street, "Is that Luis Alberto Urrea, the author?"

It is a long way from Luis' native Tijuana to Chicago, where he has spent the last twenty years and counting, a journey that filled more than 92 sixty-nine cent record books with juvenilia and eventually stories, poems, plays, songs, and novels. In all, there are now more than 300 notebooks crowded onto his shelves.

As a child, Luis wrestled consciousness every night as he lay awake in his bedroom, his parents fighting each other as well as their individual post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, the yammering and crying and yelping the order of every late evening. Luis surrounded himself with science fiction, comic books, and records—entertaining himself, but also learning. He owned a copy of Bartlett's familiar quotations, which is how Luis discovered Emerson and Thoreau; he cherished the Mark Twain books his mother bought him; he read Steve Allen's *Is It Bigger Than A Breadbox?* over and over. He'd listen to Leonard Cohen records with the volume really low.

Luis spent his childhood bouncing between his suburban San Diego home and his grandmother's hilltop house across the border. It was Tijuana Wonderland, or at least that's what Luis called it in his *Nobody's Son* essay. Women at the neighborhood tortilla spot would give Luis handmade tortillas with a little salt or lemon. Halfway down the dirt street, a bear was chained to a neighbor's dead tree. He and his cousin Hugo threw tortillas to the bear, who caught them and then waved his paw. Hugo walked around on homemade stilts and made blow guns to hunt pigeons. There were trips with his father to the Agua Caliente racetrack that included scorching water soaks with fat, naked hairy men.

"I didn't know this was extraordinary; it's just what our lives were like," Luis says. "I loved Tijuana. It was what I knew. Everyone I knew and revered was there, and everyone I knew was Mexican except my mom. Yeah, there was violence and poverty, but that was my world."

No matter what joys Tijuana represented, the Urreas moved to San Diego when Luis was three years old. He was dying of tuberculosis and a host of other poverty diseases and his parents wanted to get him to a safer environment. The move to San Diego was not far in miles, but from there to the border felt like here to the moon.

They first landed in Logan Heights, a rough place. There, it was Black versus Brown versus White, no categories that applied easily to the light-complected Tijuana kid. He was isolated. His parents disallowed social interaction with Black kids. And though Luis had a big extended family, they were a bit estranged and he was raising himself, a dynamic he explores in *The House of Broken Angels*. His father, alarmed when Luis mused about entering the priesthood, bought him a football in hopes of toughening him up.

"But I had no friends, so I would go on the dead lawn in front of our apartment, throw it like a pass, then run down and get it, then run back," Luis says. "It only takes about five throws of that to say *this is ridiculous*."

In fifth grade, the Urreas moved to the all-white suburb of Claremont. There, White kids told Luis that Mexicans smoked horseshit cigarettes, and boys in his Scout troop called him a greaser wetback. He heard every variation of every racial slur: taco bender, spic, illegal, and on and on.

“I cannot tell you how shocked I was,” Luis says. “That’s when I found out that everything I held precious was nothing but scum. That’s when I learned that Americans hated Mexicans.”

Luis turned the house into his refuge. He copied an Emerson quote onto a piece of parchment and stuck it on his bedroom wall among posters of King Kong and the Beatles and drag racing cars. He read everything he could get his hands on. He taught himself to draw and found inspiration in music. He developed a public persona of the happy go-lucky mad artist, but the stress from family and the overwhelming sense that he did not belong was palpable.

“At night, alone, I had this burning art thing going on in me,” Luis says. “I was a music fiend because of my interest in art. I was a pretty good cartoonist, illustrator, self-taught. A pretty good actor. Both of my parents, having fallen on dire straits, didn’t want me to be a dreamer; they wanted me to be practical, but I couldn’t do it.”

Luis went through phases, almost obsessive in their intensity: Jim Morrison, Richard Brautigan, Ray Bradbury. At 12, his mother introduced him to *The Wasteland*, but also Rod McKuen. In junior high, Luis discovered Ambrose Bierce. Luis kept to his corner of the house, engaging in what he called “a magical ritual,” internalizing the words of far-flung poets, musicians, and other artists.

“I was always smart,” Luis says. “I thought I was stupid, everybody seemed to think I was stupid, because I was dreamy. But I was imagining other possibilities than what was in front of me.”

And he was writing, initially in those record books late at night in his bedroom and then on an old manual typewriter in the kitchen. Eventually, between his mom’s money and his own savings from working dozens of low-level jobs, he rented an IBM Selectric -- \$21 for a weekend. From there it was a beat-up used Epson computer that he got for about a hundred bucks.

Imagine that kid, the one the Mexicans tried to knock the gringo out of and the Americans tried to knock the Mexican out of, the boy who knew the classic Cervantes novel as *Donkey Hotey*, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the intellectual and literary giants of his age. Luis, for one, struggled with that unlikely picture. There was no definition to his art, just mad scribbling—poems to win girls, song lyrics to collaborate with musician buddies, minor

theatre pieces, fragmented thoughts and impressions of life.

In Southern California at that time, there was “no acknowledgement that anybody with a name like mine had written anything” and so Luis set out to become the next Harlan Ellison.

It was at the University of California-San Diego that Luis ascended to a kind of elevated universe. It was Luis’s senior year and he had written a short story, “Father Returns from the Mountain,” in the immediate aftermath of his dad’s sudden violent death in a car accident in Mexico.

“Luis was always irreverent, often hilarious, so creative that it seemed that for him, drawing cartoons or making up outlandish stories was as easy as watching TV,” says Luis’ writing professor, Lowry Pei. “Luis never let conventional expectations slow him down or constrain his imagination. Ursula Le Guin once said, ‘We need writers who remember freedom.’ The more dogmatic and judgmental our society becomes, the more true this is, and Luis has always embodied freedom of the spirit. If he makes such freedom look like it comes without effort, that’s just part of his achievement. The appearance of light-heartedness has a flip side of intense determination. I could see that determination when he wrote ‘Father Returns,’ and it has never waned to this day.”

Pei showed the story to visiting author Le Guin, who asked to see Luis. He went to her local university apartment. She sat sideways in her chair, feet up, drinking a highball and smoking a pipe. She called him Luisito. Luis, in awe, sat on the floor.

“She said, ‘Tell me about yourself, Luisito.’ That started it.”

Before Luis left, Le Guin had invited him to join her workshop and said she wanted to buy his story. She was editing an anthology called *Edges* that would be published in 1980. “I didn’t know what that meant,” Luis says. “She already had it, everybody had it. It was there on the mimeograph.”

Joining Le Guin’s workshop helped Luis pull together all the disparate notions of himself that had accumulated over his youth. He sat across the table from peers like David Brin, benefitted from visiting writers like Toni Morrison, increased his exposure to Latino writers like Jorge Luis Borges, and all the while absorbed Le Guin’s lessons. “When Le Guin came it was seeing my deepest self and deepest dreams become possible,” Luis says.

Upon graduating, Luis was seeking meaning in a world shattered by the death of his father. Friends introduced him to a Baptist preacher named Von, who ran a ministry that worked with the poor in the garbage dumps of Tijuana. While working as a teacher's aide in the Chicano Studies department at San Diego's Mesa College, Luis began volunteering as a translator for Von. For the next six years, Luis worked with the most desperate of the poor, translating for the missionaries, begging funds from friends and neighbors, building houses in the shadows of the garbage dump.

All this time, he wrote. Nonfiction, poetry, the start of a novel. His writing was a hodgepodge of influences, from Bradbury and Borges to Jack Kerouac and Annie Dillard. He placed pieces here and there, but believed his career was moving sideways.

Living in poverty and emotionally battered by his work with the poor, Luis needed change. He reached out to his former professor Pei, now teaching at Harvard University, asking if he could help him get a job there as a janitor.

"I was desperate," Luis says. "I figured my father had worked as a janitor, I could work as a janitor. The writing life wasn't getting me anywhere."

Pei told Luis he might be able to help, but he would need a full CV and three published pieces. "I was shocked," Luis said. "I told all my idiot friends that the Ivy League was so exclusive that even janitors had to be published poets."

What Luis did not know was that Pei helped run the expository writing program at Harvard. He hired Luis to teach a freshman fiction section.

Suddenly, Luis stood among the likes of Sven Birkerts, Richard Marius, and Joseph Finder. In a kind of affirmation, Luis would send his Harvard faculty ID badge to his mom every year. More important than the prestige, though, was the access Harvard gave Luis to a broad spectrum of people. He's a natural community builder. And now he could really build for himself that writer's life that would not only be productive but also satisfying. Luis was not trained as a scholar. His intellectual pursuits included a lot of reading that the typical Ivy Leaguer might consider frivolous. He'd stumbled across Robert B. Parker's Spencer books when orienting himself to Boston, and became so enamored with Parker's writing that he decided to teach him in his writing class. "The kids loved it," Luis says. "A couple semesters in, I find his office address in Boston. I wrote, he wrote back. I said, 'It's cooler than teaching Dickens' and

he said ‘Dickens who?’ He said, ‘Maybe I could come visit your class.’ That was a Baptismal moment.”

Luis waited for Parker at the expository writing building, near the FOGG art museum, standing out there, in white tennis shoes, jeans and a Harris tweed jacket. He spotted Parker and did a double take: the famous author was wearing an identical outfit. Parker stayed two periods, and signed a stack of Luis’ books. This began a lifetime of collecting literary friends.

Luis began writing essays about his time in the Tijuana garbage dumps. Though it would take 10 years of being continually rejected, his first book *Across the Wire: Life and Hard Times on the Mexican Border* was published in 1993. It won the Christopher Award and was named a *New York Times* Notable Book.

Yet on that first book tour, Luis was an unknown, unheard of figure. Attendance, much less enthusiasm, was often sparse. “That tour was tough,” Luis says. “Nobody cared.” He spoke and read at the University of Chicago in an event so disastrous it almost blocked his later move to the city. Luis misread the audience—not anticipating that he would be talking to an extremely conservative crowd at such a venerable liberal institution. His passionate commentary about the rights of the undocumented did not go over with some of the crowd. “I sat at the signing table and nobody would look at me,” Luis says. “The driver and I laughed all the way to the airport.”

The writer’s life has its ups and downs. After *Across the Wire* came a disappointing first novel (*In Search of Snow*), but his first book of poetry, *The Fever of Being* (1994), won the Western States Book Award. The title poem in *Ghost Sickness* was a Best American Poetry selection in 1997. A second book about his Tijuana years, *By the Lake of Sleeping Children* (1996), was well received and Luis was on near-constant book tour.

As with many writers considered “literary” or “minority” or “small press,” Luis struggled with book sales and the business end of the writing life. He strung together odd teaching gigs and speaking engagements. He published two memoirs--*Nobody’s Son: Notes from an American Life* (1998) and *Wandering Time: Western Notebooks* (1999). He began the 20 years of work that would lead to his masterpiece *The Hummingbird’s Daughter*, which was based on the life of his great-aunt Teresita Urrea, also known as the Mexican Joan of Arc.

While researching the novel in Tucson, Luis met his wife Cindy, who was a newspaper reporter there. The two married and, with her two children, moved to Louisiana when Luis was offered a visiting writer's position at the University of Louisiana-Lafayette. A couple of years later, with the novel still unfinished, Luis took a position at the University of Illinois-Chicago and wondered if maybe it was time to back away from the writing career and concentrate on teaching. He wasn't completely sold on Chicago and thought he would move the family back West at the first opportunity. But UIC offered him tenure. "I'm not stupid," Luis notes.

The Urreas moved to a two-flat in Forest Park and Luis drove to his office and classes at UIC, with its brutal futuristic architecture, and came home, daydreaming of the Rockies while drowning in the candy scents wafting from the Ferrara Pan factory. He focused on his teaching at UIC, honing techniques of his own, with the novel slowly coming together. "It took me a while to realize I have to teach my own way," he says. "It was a good practice and distraction for me while I tried to get that book in shape."

At home, the Urreas were settling into their new Chicago life and started exploring. They sought out the Billy Goat Tavern, took an architectural tour, visited the Art Institute. He discovered Italian Village, which he found to be a happy place. He went to shows at the Goodman and Steppenwolf. He exposed himself to the art and history of Chicago. He found a spice warehouse on the edge of China Town where a group of ghost hunters takes you into the basement and "shit happens." He noticed old ghost signs still on buildings and outdated yellow street signs co-existing with the green replacement versions. He went to the site of the Fort Dearborn massacre. Studied the walls of the Tribune Tower. He learned about ancient flora and fauna on river and lake paths.

When youngest daughter Rosario was born six months into their Chicago adventure, Luis realized it was now home. Cindy took a reporting job with the Sun Newspapers in Naperville and brought Luis to see the East Branch of the DuPage River, the Goodrich Woods, the three covered bridges along the Naperville River Walk. Excited about the possibilities there, they decided to move out to the western suburb and Luis often drove to UIC via Ogden Ave, using the old Route 66 to further his Chicago education.

It was a practical decision to move to Naperville, but the dynamics were not lost on Luis. Here he was, a Tijuana writer exploring racial issues, especially

on the border, living in an almost all-white affluent Midwestern suburb built on developed family farms amidst the ancestors of people who'd fled Chicago when their old neighborhoods integrated.

"I am never not who I am," Luis says. "I am determined to be representative and work with as many Latino schools and groups and interests all over the city and out into Aurora and other suburbs. I never turn them down when they ask."

Though still lecturing and making appearances, Luis was frustrated with his writing career, which felt stalled. Then one day, he received a call from an editor at Little, Brown who asked if Luis would be interested in writing a book for him about a 2001 incident involving Mexican migrants in the Arizona desert.

"That just never happens, that an editor from a major press asks you to write a book," he says. "I wasn't sure how to approach it, but I sure wasn't going to say no. It was way out of my purview. I wasn't an investigative reporter. But Cindy quit her job to help me do the research."

They traveled back to Arizona several times over the next year, returning to their home in Naperville where Luis documented the journey of the 14 lost migrants and the Border Patrol search efforts to save them. *The Devil's Highway*, published in 2004, was a Pulitzer Prize finalist and won the Lannan Award. It was a national best seller and was honored in many Book of the Year lists. In addition, Little, Brown published Luis' novel *The Hummingbird's Daughter*, which also became a national bestseller and won the Kiriyaama Prize.

"I was convinced that to tell this story in a transcendent manner, I had to find someone whose focus wasn't on policy, but poetry, someone who understood the concept of 'border' in ways that could never be drawn on a map," recalls Geoff Shandler, the former Editor in Chief of Little, Brown. "My search eventually led me to a book called *By the Lake of Sleeping Children*, and two pages in I realized *I've found him*. But Luis always gives me way too much credit, because the truth is that this was a story he was meant to tell, a story he had been building toward his entire career—indeed, his entire life. So I've always felt that if I'd reached out ten minutes later he would have told me he'd already started writing it."

*The Devil's Highway's* commercial and critical success elevated Luis to whatever hovers above the tree house to which he'd gained entry at Harvard. Luis followed up that enormous success with a string of novels, *The Hummingbird's Daughter* (2005), *Into the Beautiful North* (2009), *Queen of America* (2011), and *The House of Broken Angels* (2018)-- all national best sellers and critically acclaimed. He won an Edgar Award for best short story, earned a Guggenheim Fellowship and an American Academy of Arts Award. His short story collection *The Water Museum* was a finalist for the PEN-Faulkner Award, *Into the Beautiful North* was named an NEA Big Read Selection and *The House of Broken Angels* was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award.

Luis sees a matrix between all the arts that he believes can access each other, if only we find the language to do so.

"If you really sit down with *Hummingbird's Daughter*, you can find about 25,000 Haiku in a row," says Luis. "I was deeply into Basho. You can also find all my influences. People always say my writing is related to Gabriel Garcia Marquez, but it's not. There are all these flavors. I'm trying to see this lifetime as guided learning; lately it's lot of musicians and guitarists. Listen to Steve Vai playing 'For the Love of God.' He brings me to tears, the virtuosity, the soul in it, or listen to Carlos Santana. What I'm trying to see is the cry of Heaven."

In a strange way, Luis says Chicago itself was the kickstarter for the most important phase of his career and has nurtured his writing soul in a way he doesn't always understand. Perhaps Chicago has afforded him the distance to look at the border and his writing in a different light.

"They call Chicago the city that works and it definitely made me a writer who works, that is for sure," Luis says, "I have never been more productive or successful as I have been here. The city obviously suits me. And the city itself is starting to seep into my work. I imagine that will become really apparent in the next couple of things."

"What was a shock to me was that I had been living the life of *Hummingbird's Daughter* for 26 years, my head full of shamans and healers," Luis says. "But I live HERE. And I really feel and appreciate the history and charm of this place. The Biograph--how can you not flip out going to the spot where they shot Dillinger? The art scene in town. The theatre scene--so much great theatre. Cindy loves the opera, so off we go to the Lyric all the time. The

writer community. All of it. All three of our kids are absolute die hard-never leaving, Chicagoans.”

Twenty years is longer than Luis has spent in any other place. It’s a jumping off point to his vigorous, non-stop travel schedule (at least in pre-Covid times), but it’s more than that.

Chicago has become his city and his appetite for it only increases. At UIC, he’s designed classes around Chicago folklore, literature, and history, challenging students to find the Indian trails and what’s under them, to follow the *Devil in the White City* narrative into the Columbian Exposition, to trace gangster lore from the 1920s, and find the strands in *The Jungle* that lead to the remnants of the Back of the Yards meat packing industry. He introduces Chicago ghost stories and reports of the 1968 race riots. He’s made it a point to especially reach out to first-generation Latinx students.

As a teacher, Luis believes his job is to teach “being,” and to help his students “enter the lifeway of a writer.” Those passionate efforts have produced dozens of graduates, many still local, and more than a few published books.

Though he is now seen as a “Chicago writer,” Luis has become recognized as one of the country’s foremost experts on border issues and race relations. On the surface, this seems like another irony, but not to Luis.

“It’s about how you train yourself to bear witness,” Luis says. “Those things hold true whether it’s Chicago or Chula Vista, California. If people don’t think there are border issues in Chicago, they’re blind; we just have a different sense of border. It’s more of a philosophical-spiritual journey than literary, it’s just that literature holds us together.”

Being in one place for two decades means roots. His children are “Chicago freaks.” Eric, now 32, is a drummer with a successful band, Marina City. Daughter Megan has married a Chicago native and lives in Ravenswood with their infant son. The youngest, Rosario, is studying anthropology at UIC and dreaming of a career as an archaeologist.

“It’s Chicago all the way in my family,” Luis says. “We keep insisting one of these days we’re going back to the Rockies, but I realize I can go there anytime. I’ve been given freedom, and it’s because we’re here. I am a storyteller. Stories are the most ancient human things there are and they are told here as powerfully as anywhere else.”

# **WAITING FOR LUIS ALBERTO**

by Marc Zimmerman

To my knowledge I have never met Luis Alberto, except to, maybe (did I do it?) shake his hand when he read from one of his first books about the people living in the Tijuana garbage dump at what might have been his job talk or his first public reading as a new faculty member at UIC. That was at or near the beginning of the new millennium, I believe, and by 2001 I was on my way and then gone, after 22 Chicago years, when I took a job to chair a department that housed one of the centers of U.S. Latino Literature, at the U. of Houston.

It was hello/goodbye and nêr the twain shall or should meet. And yet I want to talk about our personal relationship, before and after that ever so brief encounter that may not have taken place (I can't remember), even if doing so may remind us of that old Laurel and Hardy routine where the immortal boys just avoid finding each other as they, unknowingly or not, follow each other through the same train station boarding platform entrance and exit without ever seeing each other. Of course, Laurel was the writer-genius of the duo, and where does that leave me?

Both of us lived long in the Tijuana-San Diego border area, both of us attended the same university (though not at the same time) and of course both of us came to live in Chicagoland (though me some 20 years before him) and both have written about U.S. Latino life -- though he as an Anglo-Mexicano and I as a Russian and Romanian Jewish American transplanted from my New Jersey point of birth and rearing to the San Francisco Bay Area for my undergrad years, and then heading south to San Diego, where I taught six years at San Diego State and studied some three as a doctoral student at the University of California in La Jolla, crossing the border time and again (living long stretches of time in Ensenada), only to leave for Europe and then the Midwest but always returning over the years to imbibe once more at least the flavor of the border which Luis Alberto knew so much more deeply and intimately but which I too came to know. And we've both written at least some books about our border life, though he more inside the border than yours truly.

It was uncanny reading Luis Alberto's Tijuana-San Diego work and then reading about his life -- finding him referring to neighborhoods I knew so well on both sides of the border.



He first grew up in la Colonia Independencia in Tijuana, right near the border, not far from la zona commercial, Playas de Tijuana and the road to Rosarito and Ensenada -- worlds I came to know when he was maybe 10 and had moved away. He was a sickly child in Tijuana's mean streets, and his Anglo-American mother insisted they get him across the border, so they moved first to that intensely Mexican ramshackle border known as San Ysidro. He went to school there, and maybe he had his first McDonald's at the franchise that years later was the site of a mass killing of so many border Mexicans. On the family moved past Chula Vista and National City, past the west Logan Heights barrio, and then on further north to Hillcrest, I think, and then still further north to the Claremont area, so close to La Jolla, where he'd study theater and creative writing in the mid-1970s.

We both lived in the city at the same time for many years and knew all the spaces from San Diego downtown north to La Jolla and beyond, and south to the border: National City, Chula Vista, San Ysidro, and the colonia Independencia where he was born and lived his first years, just a short way from the border fence to the north and the road to Ensenada to the south.

In those days, San Diego was of course a tourist site, but for many of us living there, it was a sleepy Anglo-centered town dominated by active and retired military. However, later than Chicago and other points north and east, the Black power movement hit the city, and so did the Chicano movement, with Juan Felipe Herrera, a young Chicano activist and future poet laureate living pretty near to Luis Alberto in the barrio, but above all in those early days also living nearby the famous Aztlán poet, whose name sometimes gets him confused with our honoree, Alberto Baltazar Urista Heredia, better known as Alurista, who I knew when I was teaching at San Diego State, a budding young student and already widely published Chicano poet, who was later working on his Ph.D. at UCSD precisely when Luis Alberto, eight years younger than the poet and some 16 younger than me, was an undergraduate theater and creative writing student in the mid-70s.

Since I've never talked with Luis Alberto, I've never asked if he knew or heard of Alurista in those early days, but I imagine he must have, just

as I imagine that he had to have known of and perhaps participated in some of the growing interchanges between Tijuana and San Diego students in cross-border meetings, conferences and demonstrations. Maybe he participated or at least knew about the barrio struggle to establish Chicano Park in protest against the building of the Coronado Bridge which was set to carve up Barrio space and displace the residents, just as the UIC and expressway construction destroyed Chicago Mexicans, sending them to Pilsen and elsewhere several years before.

Surely in San Diego, Chicano empowerment was blowing in the wind and he must have felt the breeze, and been taken by it, as he found himself becoming a Chicano or border writer no matter how blonde or white some of the local vatos might've seen him.

Indeed, in his many YouTube recordings, you can hear Luis Alberto speak to the pain of being a white-looking Mexicano or Chicano half-breed in the San Diego streets and school. His search for identity, the level of his suffering, were great, and no matter how much he makes fun of his sense of difference and rejection, no matter how much his sense of closeness and difference has been a key to his writing, the pain is still there, although of course cushioned by his sense of fulfillment and success as a writer in which his pain has been very much part of what for him was and is “cultural capital.”

Certainly we were close enough in time and place to have experienced the spirit of the time. Maybe we attended a rally or meeting without knowing it, saw Cesar Chávez or Teatro Campesino, boycotted lettuce and grapes, picketed (as I certainly did) the barrio supermarket. But it's true I wasn't born in Tijuana and I didn't live and write about the people working and living on and off the garbage dumps near the border. It would take an angel named Luis Alberto to do that.

*This is excerpted from a longer essay. The complete version is available on the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame's blog. <https://chicagoliteraryhof.org/blog>*

# **CITIZEN OF THE WORLD**

by Kim Barnes

Perhaps it's not everyone who, when they think of Luis Alberto Urrea, has the word cosmopolitan come to mind, but it may be the one word capable of encapsulating all of Luis's endearing and enchanting emotional and creative gifts. Luis is not just a seasoned traveler; he is a citizen of the world.

This is why, no matter where I am—Chicago, San Miguel Allende, the Spanish Steps, or, as I am now, on the banks of a remote Idaho river—I will often see or experience something that makes me think, “I wish I could share this with Luis.” It's not simply because it is gorgeous or delicious, although Luis is certainly a lover of all things beautiful and yummy. More often, it is a place or person or passage from a book or a piece of folk art that is made interesting by its simplicity or complexity. More specifically, it reflects what I most value about Luis and his writing: the balance, embrace, and embodiment of the sacred and the profane. It is when these two dualities are allowed to exist in the same sphere that we attain art, and it is why, whether in the presence of Luis' words or in the presence of Luis himself, we find ourselves gripped by authentic emotion. Joy, grief, love, despair--Luis keeps himself and his characters open to all of it, and we, with our secret desires and unspoken fears, feel a little less alone in the world. Gracious, compassionate, generous—saintly words that many of us use when describing Luis and his writing—but also steely-eyed gravitas, a wicked wit, amused skepticism, and an astonishingly low tolerance for bullshit. So it is that, as friends and fans, we are blessed by his presence in our world because, no matter what that world is made up of, Luis will face it with us and come bearing another of his distinctive gifts: open-hearted curiosity, which is the mark of any world citizen worth his salt—along with the ability to be amazed by the smallest and largest of comforts and cruelties.

Luis, I want to share with you this place I am writing from--a place where waters move like arterial blood from the heart of the Bitterroot Range through Idaho and Montana, parting along mountain passes sectioned by creeks carrying chips of flint and garnet dust. Snowmelt feeds the streams that swell, become swifter, cut deeper, bisecting canyons forested with white pine, tamarack, red fir, bright patches of aspen, past abandoned gold mines and humped logging sites, through ancient cedar groves, and, after this summer's

devastating fires, acres and acres of scorched earth, nothing left but the black spines of trees. The river we fish is laddered with deadfall, and, to salve my own heartbreak, I want to tell you that, already, the water has sieved and sifted the acidic ash and runs clear as rain. I want to show you that, just around the corner from the devastation, is ridge after ridge of Western Larch that, in October, turn the colors of citrus and stone fruit, watermelon and cantaloupe, saffron, saffron, saffron—torches candled from within. You see it, don't you? Here, fire and purgation. There, light and salvation. You can feel it, can't you? Wonder and bereavement. I imagine you smiling and weeping at the sublime horror and hope. And maybe that is what I mean by cosmopolitan: not just a citizen of this world, but of any world that cleaves our hearts in two.

Thank you, Luis, for making room in your world for us and for bearing unflinching witness to ours.

*"We are fooled  
into thinking  
we are all so  
different we  
can't connect,  
we can't  
communicate."*



Photography by Mazza

# ***ESTIMADO, LUIS***

By Benjamin Alire Sáenz

It seems like a lifetime ago that I was sitting in the dining room of the house I was renting in El Paso. It was early afternoon, and I was opening a letter informing me that my short story, “Holy Week,” was accepted for publication in *Imagine*, a Chicano poetry journal that was publishing a special fiction issue. The letter was handwritten by a guy named Luis Urrea. Yes, you Luis, and you seemed very pleased to be publishing my story and you wrote a little about your religious/ spiritual inclinations and you engaged in a conversation with me, a writer you had never met. You were teaching in the writing program at Harvard University at the time, and I was enrolled in UTEP’s creative writing program. I wish I had kept that letter. It would have increased the value of my personal archives. I didn’t know then that you and I would form a lifelong friendship, having gotten to know each other at the beginning of our careers—though we did not know that we would have careers as writers. The odds weren’t in our favor.

I remember when the Lannan Foundation was still based in L.A. I was invited to read at their poetry garden, and the good people at Lannan asked me if I knew anyone in the area that I wanted to be in attendance. I’d mentioned that I’d like to have Luis Urrea, yes you, in attendance. They were kind enough to make the arrangements. That’s when I first met you face to face. I don’t know what I was expecting but I wasn’t expecting a white guy that might have passed for an active member of the Republican party. The thought crossed my mind that you played golf and were a member of the La Jolla country club—though you didn’t dress the part. Luckily, I was wrong—as I often am. I smile at the memory. It was amazing to me that when we started having a conversation that it seemed like we’d known each other for a long time. It was, you could say, love at first sight. And we have been in love ever since.

Sometimes, I felt like you were following me around. I win an American Book Award. You win an American Book Award. I was awarded a Lannan Poetry Fellowship, then you were awarded a Lannan fiction fellowship. You got the better deal. I only received \$50,000. You received \$75,000. Years later, I was a finalist for the PEN-Faulkner Fiction Award. And a few years later, you were named as a finalist for the PEN-Faulkner Fiction Award as well. I was the first

Latino to win that award (which made me a little angry). I lit a candle and uttered a prayer that you would be the second Latino to win that award. That is where I went wrong. I think my prayer wound up cursing you. You see, God and I have a rocky relationship. In fact, we do not get along at all. Right now, we are not on speaking terms. He's demanding and difficult. And he thinks he knows everything. No matter what the topic is, when I get into an argument with him, I always wind up apologizing. I mean really, I even have to kneel. What's up with that? And, I'm always in the wrong. It's like being married. Oh, and I would like to say that Cindy is much sweeter than God. I have a feeling that she makes you feel like you're generally right about almost everything. It isn't true, and no one knows that more than she—Cindy may be sweet but you will never out stubborn her. I'm sure you're gracious in defeat. You're lucky to have her. And you were so happy when you met her. And I was happy that you found her because you wanted to have someone in your life to love, someone in your life that would love you in return. You deserved to be happy--just as you deserved all the success that has come your way. You worked hard. Between your work ethic, your talent, and your desire to create something worthy and excellent.

Luis, I can't think of any of my colleagues that I love, respect, and admire more. Your work is essential not only for the Latino community—but for the writing community at large.

You are as gifted as you are funny. Whenever we manage to see each other at literary events, you catch a glimpse of me from 20 feet away and your voice automatically booms out: "Pinchi Benjamin." You know, a homie is a homie. Those gringos don't know what to think. We just can't refrain from our immigrant behavior.

Luis, you are as gifted as you are passionate about your writing and your politics. You are as gifted as you are affectionate.

You are not just likeable—you are loveable.

I have always been so thrilled and happy for all the success that has come your way. You make it look easy—but you and I know that there is nothing easy about writing books when you care so much not only about the craft of writing but care so much about your subject matter.

You have enriched the Latino community that you fight for, that you speak on behalf of. I cherish your presence in my life. I treasure your writing. I treasure your voice.

I am proud to be your friend. I consider myself blessed to have had you as a fellow traveler all these many years. I will always remember that it was you who published my first story. I still remember meeting up with you in L.A. and in Tucson. I'm happy to know that the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame is honoring you with a lifetime achievement award. In honoring you tonight, the CLHOF honors all the good and decent things they stand for. Luis, you are an honorable man, and it is my distinct pleasure to join in celebrating a career that has been magical. I wish I was there to hug you and Cindy and to thank you for what your noble heart has given.

Desde nuestra querida frontera te mando todo mi carino y respeto y un fuerte abrazo. Hermano, que Dios me lo cuide.

Tu servidor, Benjamin el travieso del Chuco (also known as Pinchi Ben)

*“The people I love the most and the stories I love the most were across that border in Mexico. That was my refuge. It wasn’t a filthy place of horror, it was home.”*



Working with orphans and poor (Mexican borderlands '78)

# THE WRITER YOU ARE

by Kathleen Blackburn

When Luis teaches creative writing workshops, he sits not at the head of the table, but somewhere unassuming along the side. A writer, his posture says, among writers. But let us say you are a graduate writing student and when people ask, you respond with “I’m in a creative writing program,” never “I’m a writer,” though you are after this very title. Let us imagine you are a dutiful graduate student, and you want to impress the famous writer, the Pulitzer Prize finalist, the master teacher. You are hoping this writer holds some secret to your future success. When you walk into the classroom, you observe the conference table, its glossy faux pine finish, the head of the table where answers are supposed to fuse into the figure of a literary giant: empty.

Here’s what students of Luis know: he will not ask you to prove anything, not to him. There is no amount of deference or imitation or bad theatre that will win favor. His feedback on your manuscript will return in the form of images inspired by your descriptions – snakes, cacti. The occasional “holy god” written in the margins. He will sometimes request to live with your draft and tuck it into a satchel swung over the back of his chair. Once, a fellow student asks of Luis, “What’s the secret to becoming you?” Instead of pontification, Luis offers something less traditional, and more challenging: in removing himself from head of the table, he has cleared that space between you and the page. Writing, this teaches, is a full-contact sport. Oh, and it’s a solo event, this encounter with language and self. Luis will show you bruises and scars from his own competitions. He’ll invite you into your own dark. He’ll pledge himself beacon, so you can find your way back. When a student asks how to become Luis, which, let’s face it, is what we all want – the charm, the brilliance, the humor, the generosity, the marked impact on American letters, all so uniquely Urrea – Luis says, “Eat shit for forty years.”

It is said that Gordon Lish used to ask of writers, what is the one thing about you that, if revealed, would undo your identity. Luis puts this question differently, in a way more generous and more direct. While a student in the Program for Writers at UIC, I took my first workshop with Luis in 2016. On that first day, Luis asked, *why do you write?* You were not to emote for him, or confess to the person sitting next to you, or compose a statement of purpose, or construct a thesis, or fashion a grant proposal, or produce your elevator

pitch. He asked, instead, for two pages that disassemble your public persona, your Facebook status, your insta joy. So maybe Luis does know some secrets of craft or craftiness, some black magic, some shaman practice. Because in one swift motion, the writer you want to be is replaced by the writer you are.

Now to congratulate the man who would rather be picking trails through the desert, or listening to the stories of the dispossessed, or sitting at the middle of the table rather than the head. Now to acknowledge the master who will in turn call you *friend*: thank you, Luis, for holding forth and steadfast the light.

*“I have always been interested in that border...Not the Mexican Border. The human border.”*

High school - San Diego



With mother Phyllis ('87)

# ***trying to find meaning like an English student***

by Angelica Julia Davila

I've been holding onto something dear for a few years now. I first met Luis while I was completing my master's program back in 2016 when I decided to take his creative non-fiction workshop. Little did I know that each year I'd be returning to take his workshop even if I did not have anything written for it because of the type of atmosphere that he always creates where an artist is nurtured not scolded. Back in 2016 during my first workshop with him, he gave each of us a signed copy of his book, *The Water Museum: Stories*. To me, books are wonderful and personal gifts and by this time I considered Luis a mentor. The following poem recounts the aftermath where having left the workshop I tried to protect this book from the weather elements outside. I've kept this poem near me all these years, and I thought what better place to share it than here.

Of all the times, of all the occasions, of all the opportunities—  
I chose today, as the day of all days, to not have an umbrella.

The rain is light.

They call it *mojapendejo*.

The rain **was** light.

The rain was rain, and the rain is rain, and the rain will still be rain, but!

Me? I'm just trying to save this book.

An inopportune moment, this man,  
he gave me this book, and!

I'm clutching onto this paperback while it rains,  
the spine of the book facing toward my chin, as  
I struggle to keep it close to my chest,  
the wool of my black coat offering minimal comfort to it,  
as the glossy cover begins to moisten.

I got a bag, you see.

But in this bag I got these things—

work documents, work reports, a laptop,

you know, the kind of things that rain shouldn't ruin,  
or else it digs into your pockets, you see, right?

And I'm just trying to save this book.

The *mojapendejo* turns into faster, heavier, angrier rain.

And I'm just clutching this book as close to my chest as I can, if!

I could cut out a little nook within my body, I would to  
place the book within the nook so the nook can be filled with this book,  
this book that I'm trying to save.

I can feel my flooded socks.  
I can feel my dripping hair.  
I can feel my breathing increase, as!

I try to save this book.  
I'm just trying to save this book, and!

The man, you know, the man who gave me this book  
during such an inopportune moment and day, 'cause of the rain,  
you can call him a mentor of sorts, except  
he doesn't, probably doesn't, most likely doesn't know he's a mentor, but!

He wrote this book, and!

He signed this book, and!

He scribbled my name into this book, and!

I'm just trying to save this book.

I cut corners, quick.  
If I stick to the pavement, this book will surely die.  
My car, a safe haven, stands still across the park, so!

I cut the corner, quickly, and  
with each step I take into the grassy terrain,  
my feet sink, into  
the mud.

I can feel my boots slide.

I can feel my bangs sift water onto my face.

I can feel the wetness begin to soak through my coat and into my sweater, as!

I reach the end of the never-ending wildlife, and  
the pouring rain slows and it becomes  
the *mojapendejo* once more, and!

The book is safe.

The book is only lightly drizzled on, but  
nothing a paper towel can't fix, so!

I dig into my pocket, searching for my car keys.

I saved this book, the book that the unknown mentor man gave me during such  
an inopportune moment and day, 'cause of the rain.

, but!

, a twist!

I lose my grip on the book, and it falls into a puddle.

Me? I just tried to save this book.

, but!

, a twist!

The book emerges from the puddle, with  
water dripping from its crevices, and  
this in itself is a metamorphosis.

The book emerges with a story to tell about the time I tried saving a book by  
Luis Alberto Urrea that Luis Alberto Urrea gave to me in class.

The book is just a book.

The book is most certainly not just a book.

The book was/is a book.

The book was always meant to be destroyed by *mojapendejo*  
because Luis still exists.

# THE TIJUANA WRITERS CLUB

by Alex Espinoza

I grew up a shy, awkward kid. I guess a lot of us can claim that, though, but my situation was complicated by the fact that I was gay, disabled, and Mexican. Born the youngest of eleven children to parents from the state of Michoacán in western Mexico, little was expected from me. People tended to look at me with a sense of both pity and morbid curiosity. Their glances seemed to say, *Man, dude. You're screwed.* And I felt screwed, to be honest. I grew up among the factories, used tire shops, liquor stores, and empty dirt lots of suburban Los Angeles. I chased dreams as far reaching as the bits of trash swirling up into the sky above my head, carried by dust devils whipped up from the breeze of passing rail cars and semis barreling down the street. My family was poor. I was an unplanned pregnancy, born to illiterate parents, to a mother already in her mid-forties, to siblings who didn't want me.

"You should be embarrassed," my sister reportedly scolded my mother. "Getting pregnant at such an old age. Sinvergüenza."

Conceived in California, my mother went into labor while visiting family in Tijuana. I was born in a colonia that no longer exists, a neighborhood washed away by rain and mud, time and memory. I once unfolded a map of Tijuana, grabbed my mother's index finger and implored her to show me where I was born.

She shrugged her shoulders and said, "Se borró. Junto con la esperanza."

That, along with an endless stream of negative depictions about the place, made me ashamed of having been born there. For decades I never said "Tijuana" when asked where I'd been born. San Diego, a random hospital in downtown Los Angeles, somewhere in the desert. Anyplace but Tijuana. The last thing I wanted as a child, and even well into my teenage and young adult years, was for people to discover the city of my birth.

The first time I remember going to Tijuana was when I was about six or seven. This was the late 1970s. Along with my mother, brothers, and cousins, we piled into my uncle's Chevy van and headed south on Interstate 5 towards the border. I remember looking through the heart-shaped back window of the van, seeing long lines of cars at the checkpoint, streams of people carrying

ceramic donkeys, and still others darting between the traffic to sell boxes of gum in brightly-colored packages, cold sodas, and bags of pork rinds drizzled with hot sauce and lemon juice. Once we passed the frontera, I could see the distant hills beyond the snarl of traffic. There were houses and buildings perched precariously on the steep cliffsides and they reminded me of the brightly colored nests of the birds in our backyard. And even though I still refused to be honest about my place of birth, I remember developing a newfound appreciation for my mother after that trip. She had come from so little. She gave so much of herself to me. I never told her this.

Back in high school, all we'd read were white writers like Twain and Shakespeare. In fact, my first attempts at writing involved conjuring up stories that were set in England. There were always references to fog, moats, and cemeteries. It wasn't until community college that I encountered writers of color. There, suddenly, the possibility of becoming an author myself was suddenly more attainable, and this was why I decided to pursue creative writing when I transferred to a university. A professor of mine, the esteemed California writer Susan Straight, was the first person who told me to read Luis Alberto Urrea.

"He's from Tijuana too," she said.

I remember that tattered copy of *By the Lake of Sleeping Children* I checked out from the Tomás Rivera Library at UC-Riverside. I saw myself, my mother, and her struggles to fight for a better life in the people Urrea wrote about. As a student of the craft of writing, I was completely unsure of myself, doubtful, and insecure. Luis' work anchored me to that world, made me remember the sacrifices my mother made, made me proud of the life she had lived. Her loyalty to our family and our legacy gave me the strength I needed to push forward. I didn't know Luis back then. I wanted to, though. I wanted to know him so badly, to shake his hand, to thank him for giving those voices dignity, legitimacy on the page. Here were my people. Finally. *Mi gente*.

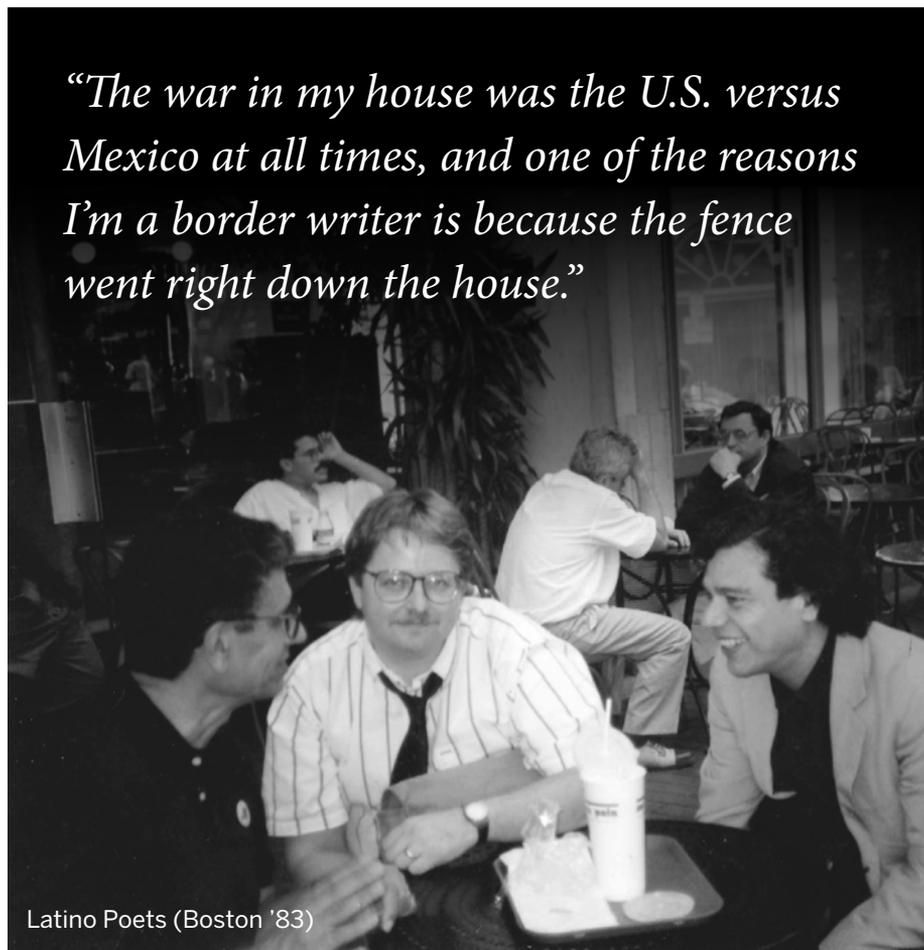
I remember meeting Luis, and one of the first things I said to him was, "I'm a writer who was also born in Tijuana!"

He laughed heartily, placed his arm around me, and said, "Pues, órale. Let's start a club. You and me."

This is what I have come to love about Luis Alberto Urrea, both the person

and the writer. It is his loyalty to people—to the characters he writes about, to other writers he has helped foster—I admire the most. His big heart shines through and continually serves to remind me of who I am, where I come from, and why I write. I've known him now for several years, and his friendship, his support, his writing, and encouragement are unwavering, a constant presence in my life, something I have come to depend on. And his laugh. And his sense of humor. Luis Alberto Urrea makes me proud to be a Tijuana writer. We are wild. We are renegades. We love with the force of a thousand revolutions. Thank you, Luis, for your friendship, your support, and for showing me what it means to write with courage and dignity and to never, ever be ashamed of the place where we both began.

*“The war in my house was the U.S. versus Mexico at all times, and one of the reasons I’m a border writer is because the fence went right down the house.”*



Latino Poets (Boston '83)

# ABSENCE

By Jamie Ford

If you're reading this, you're there  
I'm here and I'm the lesser for it.

Oh, how I wish I could be there!

I wish I was there because not only is Luis  
my dearest friend, my brother,  
in the lonely cosmos of publishing,  
but he is getting this award  
the old-fashioned way.

With a lifetime of good deeds, selfless acts,  
with humor and humility,  
a generosity of spirit that is lacking  
in our pale, anemic,  
*move-at-the-speed-of-twitter* world.

Oh, and there's the work.

The books and poetry and short fiction  
that are not only timeless, they're needed.  
They're necessities.  
They're our recommended daily allowance  
of grace and authenticity.  
They're curettes, designed to debride  
the wounds of our times.

Only then can we be healed.

I miss you, my friend.  
But I'm so honored,  
That you *are* my friend.

I owe you a glass, or a bottle  
of writer's tears.

# **KEEP HOPE ALIVE**

by Lowry Pei

I first met Luis in 1977. He was in his senior year of college at UC San Diego, and I was an assistant professor, teaching a fiction writing class which I was less than qualified to lead. But somewhere behind the scenes, the University of California had decided to bring Ursula Le Guin to campus and have her teach the last month of that very class of mine. In this class Luis wrote “Father Returns from the Mountain,” which I think is what made him realize how much he could do with words. It certainly did that for me, and for Le Guin. She opened the door for him -- but Luis has told this story himself, better than I can, and you can find it on his website. Read it, please.

The thing is that once somebody opens the door for you, you still have a long way to go and nobody can make it easier for you to get there. You don't even know if there is a there for you to get to, and when somebody tells you there's a path to follow, it turns out that was their path and nobody else can replicate it. The real achievement, the hard thing that doesn't attract notice, is hanging in there.

Luis' road was not easy. He isn't kidding when he writes about how tough his childhood was, or how weird and threatening some of his experiences have been. You might secretly wonder if some of the surreal details are the product of his insatiable imagination, but the point is, they're not. Actual reality is surreal – maybe Mexican reality especially, or so Luis has taught me – if you pay attention, if you manage to find words for what actually happened. Luis has always been able to do both of those difficult things.

In an admirable and almost inexplicable way, when Luis has had to confront misery and horror, he has managed to do it with what ultimately feels like good cheer. Or at least he narrates the confrontation that way. He's a born performer, and perhaps it is the case that he performs resilience, that he performs the ability to bounce back, to persevere, to overcome, not only for others but in the first place for himself. Until it becomes real. However he comes by this ability, he has it. He's been flat broke more than once since we first met – scraping along, barely getting by, in need of a lifeline. He's lived through at least two periods of wondering if he'd ever get out of the situation he was trapped in, or if he would be destroyed by his circumstances. His first

marriage was such that he once asked me, after it was over, why I didn't tell him what a huge mistake he was making before he went through with it. He didn't just one day turn into a distinguished professor; Luis had his share of what he called "teaching grammar to plumbers," at community colleges for crappy pay. When he wrote *In Search of Snow*, he referred to it as "McGurk in Search of Dough" because he seldom made a dime from his writing (and McGurk didn't do much to change that). It wasn't until *The Hummingbird's Daughter*, when he was fifty years old, that he broke through, made the front page of the *New York Times Book Review*, and started to pull in real money. A good thing, too; Cindy had saved his life in Tucson and married him, and he had a family to support.

Luis has the literary world surrounded: he's published novels, short stories, poems, memoirs, and books that hover on the boundary between memoir and first-person reportage. He's everywhere you look. Everybody wants him to come and stand on their stage and hold forth, not only because he is this ridiculously accomplished writer, but because he is an irresistible presence. Give him a microphone, and as soon as he begins to speak you trust him, and you know that for the duration all will be well. Luis, the veteran of so many spiritual struggles of his own, lifts the spirits of those around him, of those who read him. In a world where this is no easy mission, he keeps hope alive. And that is what I call a lifetime achievement.



Harvard Summer Fiction Writing Workshop ('84)

# THE EXEMPLAR OF BADASSERY

by CMarie Fuhrman

NPR calls Luis Alberto Urrea a literary badass. Though he scoffs at this, I can't help but see the truth in it. At first glance, it may seem that the phrase refers to the amount of work that he has given us. He has written seventeen books—published in every genre. Or perhaps this hints toward the multiple awards he has won, including the honor of being a Pulitzer Finalist for his nonfiction book, *The Devil's Highway*. Or maybe it is because the guy is always on the road teaching, giving readings, popping up at book clubs, and visiting schools.

It is all of those things; also, I think his badassedness has to do with something more.

I became friends with Luis, albeit Facebook friends at first, about a decade ago. His first communication to me was: “I am rooting for you. All the way. Spirit dictates that we find each other, and all of us keep the fires burning. Night is upon us, but daylight is within us.”

I was astounded by such generosity from a man whose time and attention are in such high demand. But the correspondence continued. Each message was as kind as the first, and then I finally met Luis during Fishtrap at Lake Wallowa, Washington. There, the generosity, kindness, and teaching accelerated. I learned about writing, sure, but I also learned something even more critical. Looking back through my notes of his talks written in the bound journals he gave us all, I find the word “love” over fifty times.

Then the word “spirit” comes in twenty times. Followed by the words “soul” and “create.” Then, “fight.” Work. Fire. Story. Story, Story.

In his 2016 manifesto “Hymns to the Broken,” Luis closes by saying I love you six times.

To me, this is literary badassery.

In 2016, he sent me the message, “We stand together. I believe in you.” I had just begun my writing career.

More than any publication or recognition since, these words lit a fire in me that has never stopped burning.

Again, from Luis' "Manifesto," a moment in Cuernavaca with a healer, who says to him, "You are one of us." No, I said. I wish. "You are," she said. I would give anything to be able to heal people, I said. To be able to take away the pain. I would give up everything and do that. "You could," she said. "Because you are one of us. You can do it by writing." What? "Didn't anybody teach you anything? Literature is one of the healing arts. You can heal people with words."

And Luis has. And perhaps most importantly, he gives this education away; he passes it on to his students. He shows us that there is room at the table, that we are all capable, that our voices are essential.

From my time as Luis' friend and student, I learned writing is less about where to put a comma or how to get published and more about where to put my heart. He reminds me that I have permission to write. I have a duty to write. More important than awards and publications and press releases is honoring the writer in myself. Honor the story—your words matter.

This is literary badassery.

So, when I learned that The Chicago Literary Hall of Fame would honor Luis Alberto Urrea with the Fuller Award for lifetime achievement, I wanted to lend my voice to talk about the Luis I know. The kind man who draws pictures on bookmarks and hands them out freely. The man who is not afraid of the words "God" and "love" and "soul." The man who honors his terrific wife, Cindy. Despite all his success, the man who is the kind of writer we should all aspire to be, the type of writer who constantly reaches behind for the hands of those who need pulling up. The writer that signs every message with x's and o's and who closes his manifesto by saying:

I love you  
I love you  
I love you  
I love you  
I love you

# POMEGRANATES FOR LUIS

by Bobby Byrd

Luis, brotherman,

I got an email from Don Evans telling me how the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame is giving you their Lifetime Achievement Award. Yahoo! Good for you! You certainly deserve it. Your work deserves it! My gosh. But then Don very graciously asked me to contribute to your celebration. I was flummoxed. What was I going to say? We've not been in touch, especially with this pandemic, the Tucson Book Festival and all the others shut down for two years now. I miss you.

Do you remember this photo of you and me sitting on Monument Marker 1? You are sitting on the Mexican side, I'm sitting on the U.S. side. That's such a magical place, between two countries, between two cities, the river running through, especially back then before Trump and his minions built the Wall and made it impossible to get near the monument. Sitting



right there we could see where Francisco Madero and his men crossed the Rio Grande (Bravo) to start the Revolution against Porfirio Diaz. Pancho Villa came to join him. That was a wonderful day, me taking you on my rasquache tour of El Paso— the Smelertown Cemetery, El Paso Street crossing into Juarez, Chihuahuita, Segundo Barrio, Concordia Cemetery and the grave of John Wesley Hardin. What delighted me was that you were totally at home in El Paso. The city was like just another house on the street where you grew up. And like other houses on your street, this house was inhabited by ghosts. Pancho Villa, for instance, Felipe Angeles, but most importantly for you, Teresa Urrea, aka Teresita, la Santa de Caborca.

I shouldn't have been surprised, of course. You're a border person, un puro fronterizo. You grew up in the jingle jangle of Tijuana. In the evening, that

first time when you showed up with your friend, each of you carrying private sorrows on your backs, we sat on the front porch with a few beers and looked out over the river to Mexico. You regaled us with stories about your growing up. It was bizarre hearing them, your father a macho Mexican federale, and your mom an elegant woman from some well-to-do Boston folk. That space between him and her was certainly another border you had to cross every day of your life. Your father was your hero, a superman from the magical world of Rosario, Sinaloa with so many great adventures to tell his son. But your mother was also mysterious, that elegant Bostonian lady amid the confusion of Tijuana. A strange lineage, to be sure, but together they certainly were the source of your gifts.

What makes your work so important to me, and for all of us, is that your writing goes back and forth across all borders with courage, compassion and grace. Both Sides / No Sides. Not one without the other. You the big white guy who is Mexican. You the Mexican who looks like a gringo. El Vato Gringo. Your writing navigates the space in between, the space that brings the two sides together as one. It's dangerous, as your heroes always show us, but it's a necessary human action if we are to survive.

It's been an honor for Lee and me and for Cinco Puntos Press to publish four of your books, and for me personally to know you as a good friend, a fellow poet y un compadre de la frontera.

Thank you, thank you.

Your friend, Bobby

Postscript: When I told Lee that I had been asked to write this piece, she blurted out, "Well, if it wasn't for Cindy, he would still be walking down Elm Street with that big sad friend of his headed for Baskin Robbins." I had to laugh. She was right. Back in those days, you were like Icarus headed for the sun, your wings of wax already melting away. Cindy tethered you into that wondrous border between heaven and earth. As my mother would say, "Thank your lucky stars."

# EL REY

By Ben George

Luis Alberto Urrea is one of the very finest American writers working today. But beyond that, Luis is a global literary citizen and ambassador. He gives up untold hours of his time to speak to young people everywhere about literature and about his stories, helping to grow the next generation of readers, particularly young Latinx readers who often have not seen themselves represented in our national literature until they read one of his glorious books.

Among the many enviable qualities that place Luis in the firmament of our finest writers, one is his tremendous range. He is a poet—an author of truly wonderful poems—and you feel the soul of the poet in the language and imagery of all his fiction. When it comes to that fiction, he can write both short and long: brilliant short stories and capacious, ambitious, deeply felt novels. And he can write incisive nonfiction about the most significant and vexing conundrums we face, taking us into the heart of their humanity. Seventeen years after his landmark work *The Devil's Highway* was published, it is now in its thirtieth paperback printing. Part of me wishes it weren't still so relevant, because that would mean we had become more humane and visionary, and had solved some of the harrowing problems it lays out for us. But it remains a necessary book. Like his best fiction, the work is mythical and biblical in both its designs and its effects. It is a lasting piece of writing that continues to astound, to instruct, and to challenge readers to this day.

Luis is our angel of the borderlands. He illuminates our troubles, he reveals how connected we are to one another, and through his luminous words he lights the path to greater understanding and communion and love. As anyone who has experienced the De La Cruzes in *The House of Broken Angels* knows, to read Luis's work is to be embraced in the most generous of all literary bear hugs. I see you, his work says. I see you in all your flaws, all your glories, all your devastations, all your triumphs, all your humiliations—I see you in all your beautiful human mess, and I love you for it.

There are vanishingly few writers who could make you laugh in one paragraph and cry in the next. Luis is one of those rare storytellers. He writes out of a fulsome heart and a deeply perceptive intelligence. His prose

transcends. He is inarguably an essential American master, and our national literature is immeasurably richer for his contributions.

Luis: I cherish your work, carnal, and the privilege it has been to steward some of it into the world. Congratulations on this spectacular and well-deserved honor. Con amistad, Ben

*“As long as there have been people, there have been deaths in the western desert. When the Devil’s Highway was a faint scratch of desert bighorn hoof marks, and the first hunters ran along it, someone died.”*



# ***STUDENT OF THE VACANT LOT SCHOOL, CA. 1990***

by Stewart O’Nan

I think it was Chris Offutt who introduced us—virtually, that is, passing along Luis’s AOL address. I’m not sure of the occasion, though it must have been at the end of the last century, because I know Luis then connected me to Lowry Pei, who’d written a less-than-sparkling review of Richard Yates’s last novel. I was working on an essay about Yates, and Luis said he’d hook me up with Pei, which he did, starting yet another far-flung literary friendship.

What struck me first about Luis, as we chatted online, beyond how funny and smart he was, was how much junk culture we still loved. From punk to metal to comics to grindhouse classics like *I Spit on Your Grave* and *Vanishing Point*, we had a common vocabulary, a kind of fanboy shorthand like the secret language of twins. Yet at the same time--from the jump, really--having read his poetry and his early masterpiece of lived reportage, *Across the Wire*, I knew he was serious, an important voice, someone everyone needed to read.

Back then, he was mostly a poet. Now, after decades of tireless, inspired work, he’s better known as a novelist, a weaver of sweeping family sagas that straddle the shifting border of Mexico and the U.S., spanning generations, even centuries. Epic, yes, but look at his eye for detail, listen closely and you’ll hear the poet building the world one image, one syllable at a time.

A greater element of writing that we’ve discussed over the decades is the vacant lot. For a poem or a story or an essay to be any good, it’s got to have a sense of the vacant lot. The recognition of failure, of the brokenness of the world, of what’s inevitably lost. Soul, maybe. Dreams deferred. The forsaken and overlooked. We’ve never quite defined it. There’s no need. As Marley says, who feels it knows it. Yates felt it. Woolf felt it. Baldwin. Algren. No matter how epic or dire or comic or gorgeous the mode and movement of Luis’s work, secretly, even when it’s nowhere in frame, underneath he’s pondering that vacant lot and how we all own a part of it, how at some point we all end up back there. The lot grounds us. The lot keeps us honest—even more essential in this false, triumphal age. So while Luis is being given the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame’s Fuller Award, and deservedly, he’s still going to be hanging out where the fence is rusted and weeds have taken over and the mural honoring the neighborhood dead of the ‘80s has faded into the bricks. You know, where the real poets are.

# TRIBUTES

## *Poetry in His Hands*

Luis Alberto Urrea is a great writer and an endearing human being, generous, irreverent, funny, smart and wise. I am honored to call him my friend. He is always willing to lend a hand and to help other writers; he is fully committed to our Latino community; he is the voice of so many who are silenced or have no voice. There are many good reasons why he has long been hailed as one of our most important contemporary writers. But there are (at least) two that make his work absolutely memorable: he creates extraordinary characters to reflect his endless faith in people and their humanity, present in every piece of prose and verse he writes. And the exquisite music, the lyrical intensity of his storytelling, which is to say that everything, even death, can feel like poetry in his hands.

**Isabel Allende**

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## *Aquí entre nos ..*

Luis Alberto Urrea nuestro celebrado hombre dorado continúa tu *trail blazing* éxitos literarios y a lo mejor hasta La Luna nos llevas. O de perdis a *Hol—lyyy—wood!* Mientras eso pasa maestro nosotros en LALS esperamos aprender contigo a contar nuestras historias.

Y en menos que cante un gallo, después de tus clases tertulias y talleres, queremos aprender a escribir y narrar historias, de las buenas como las tuyas.

Felicidades profe, hermano, compañero, primo del Noortee, Tijuana, y San Diego por tu *Fuller Award for lifetime achievement del Chicago Literary Hall of Fame.*

Pero aquí Entre Nos, viene de tu gente, caído directito de el Sol y de Nuestra Santa Teresita.

Luis Alberto Urrea --*un honor bien merecido.*

**Marta Elena Ayala**

## ***Bringing the News and Lifting the Heart***

I met Luis Alberto Urrea when we were both graduate students at UC San Diego, teaching in the Fourth College Writing program under the inspiring leadership of Lowry Pei. We helped to put out a literary journal from the program called *The Tiny Rhino Review*, the name coming from Luis's artwork, which at that time featured a lot of tiny rhinos. It was a good journal, although it only lasted two issues, maybe one.

We were also fellow students in the writing workshop taught by guest instructor Ursula K. Le Guin. This was one of the great events of my life, and I know from what Luis has written about it that it was the same for him. Le Guin is justly famous as one of America's great writers, but we were lucky to find out that she was also a great teacher— funny, focused, interesting, and intent to understand our individual projects, and help us get along our own path.

That was it for Luis and me— a few years in our busy youths, and then we went our separate ways. But I've been reading his published work ever since, and what a huge pleasure and education that has been. Luis is one of our greatest living novelists. I particularly love *The Hummingbird's Daughter*, a beautiful and moving novel. All of his books are vivid and powerful experiences. They bring the news and lift the heart.

So I read him with joy, and am proud to have known him when we were students. A few years ago we crossed paths at the Tucson Book Festival—what fun! I hope it happens again.

Now I'm thinking about the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame. Once I asked my Clarion teacher Gene Wolfe why he had crossed Hemingway's "The Boxer" with L. Frank Baum's Oz novels, in his story "The Eyeflash Miracles." Not an obvious move to generate a story, I would have said, although the result is amazing. Instantly Wolfe replied, "Because they were both Chicago writers, and so am I."

Now Luis joins that crowd, and is a wonderful addition to it. Congratulations to him and to those who selected him, and to Chicago.

**Kim Stanley Robinson**

## ***A Helping Hand***

I first met Luis Urrea long before I considered myself a writer. After attending one of his talks as a fan at the Tucson Festival of Books, I nervously approached him to speak about some of the ways my experiences on the border connected to his own. I left feeling enthused that I had engaged with an author who meant so much to me—one of the precious few writers whose work helped me make sense of the place I call home. Then, years later, as a newly-minted MFA student who was just beginning to think that I, myself, might have a story to tell, I approached him after another event in Tucson. To my surprise, Luis remembered me, and I told him I was attempting to write my own book about the border. His reply is one I'll never forget—he looked me in the eye and said, with all sincerity, *I want to help you.*

From that day forward, Luis encouraged my work the same way he has done for so many others—with generosity, enthusiasm, and endless good humor. I have often thought that my book would simply not exist were it not for Luis Urrea, both for the mentorship he provided along the way, and for the space he helped open long ago for writers like me to grapple with all the violence, joy, and moral complexity of the border, and the myriad ways it continues to shape our identities, relationships, and shared culture. Today, whenever I meet a young writer with their own story to tell, I remind myself of the model Luis offered me all those years ago, and I begin, always, by looking them in the eye, by offering my help.

**Francisco Cantú**

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## ***Stories That Listen***

I will never forget the day that I joined your *tertulia* with UIC students. The students were rapt as you shared parts of your life story. But so, too, were you rapt when they shared parts of theirs. In those moments, you lived the true art of storytelling, which lies as much in the listening as it does in the telling. In your many stories, you listen and you tell, and in doing so, you enrich all of our lives. *Muchas felicidades* dear friend and colleague on an honor so well-deserved.

**Lisa A. Freeman**

### ***Enlivening Everyone Around Him***

Luis Urrea and his family have grown to become friends of mine. It all began years ago when Luis was my student and I already saw his future before him. He was, and has continued to be, sharp, quick as a snake in his humorous responses, and enlivening everyone around him. His writing already was superb and it has only become so much better, as witness this award and his amount of publications and the lively response to his work.

Luis has always had promise and he has been true to that promise, writing, telling stories, making an audience laugh or weep, depending on which part of a story or a life he is speaking into the world.

Now I would love to return to school as his student and reverse roles. I offered what I could and he has grown. Now I would love to receive what he has learned in these years and must offer his students and colleagues.

Sending a brief comment about a powerful writer, and with my love, friendship, and admiration.

**Linda Hogan**

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### ***A Warrior for Literacy***

I feel blessed to know Luis Alberto Urrea and call him a friend. Not only is Luis an eloquent and powerful writer, but he is an even better human. He represents the best of humanity. Luis is a warrior for literacy and an even stronger advocate for those who are less fortunate, looking to read their way to a better life. In the early days of Bernie's Book Bank, Luis was enthusiastically willing to be our keynote speaker at one of our first Book Lovers' Events. The audience loved Luis and his storytelling. We felt so proud to have such a high caliber author and literary icon participate at such an early stage of our growth as an organization. I am so happy for Luis, he is well deserving of this honor, GO LUIS!

**Brian Floriani**

## ***My Trusty Guide***

In 1992, I was working as a secretary at a high school exchange program in Spokane, Washington. I'd published a couple dozen poems in small magazines and my first book was soon to be published. But I was still very much a novice. So I was extremely nervous when I traveled to The University of Colorado, Boulder, for my first gig as a visiting poet. And it was there that I met Luis Urrea. He was a student in the MFA program but he was more experienced than I was and comfortable in the literary world. I think I'm older than him but I still felt like his little brother. He was kind and funny and drove me around Boulder for the various gigs and parties. He was very honest about the good and bad that I was going to encounter in the literary life. He warned about the writerly jealousy that I'd face during that visit and every visit I would ever make. On the last night I was in Boulder, Luis drove me to my hotel. I was very hungry and I asked him where I could eat. Luis told me to order room service. I said that I couldn't afford it. He said the university was picking up all my expenses. Okay, I said, how do I do it? And Luis said there would be a button on the phone that said Room Service. Press that button, Luis said, and order what you want. So I ended up eating steak and lobster while soaking in the tub as ESPN's SportsCenter played on the little TV that was in the bathroom. Yeah, I was a reservation Indian boy enjoying the weird joys of being a traveling poet. That is still one of my fondest memories. And Luis was my trusty guide during all of it.

**Sherman Alexie**

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## ***The Highest Honor***

Congratulations to my compañero Luis Alberto Urrea! I've known Luis since his Harvard days. I've always said that nobody writes with more clarity and power about the border than Luis: see *The Devil's Highway*. But check out his poem *Vatos*, published in collaboration with the photographer José Galvez. That poem, about the men and boys in his community, made me cry. That's the highest honor I can bestow. Gracias por todo, Luis.

**Martín Espada**

## *The World as Story*

I once wrote of Luis Alberto Urrea that sitting down to talk with him—which it has been my honor and pleasure to do a handful of times—is like ‘stepping into the clear rushing stream of a conversation already in progress.’ The stream is an overworked metaphor to be sure, but it feels so resonate, so bubbly and beautifully resonate, with Luis’s art and craft and life. A stream knows no borders, no fixed beginnings and ends, it digresses and plays, stands still and rushes, pools up, dwindles down, does whatever it will, bedamned you who would interfere with its plot! Across his work, Luis crosses many different borders, most especially the literal, physical border between Mexico and the United States, and how that arbitrary and yet heavily enforced line structures his mind, his writing and his history. He also refuses borders, including that very same border between Mexico and the United States, between truth and imagination, fiction and nonfiction, dreaming and reality, or, and especially, between story and the world. In fact, I think Urrea sees the world *as* story. In his book *Wandering Time: Western Notebooks*, Luis writes “I have chosen, or am choosing, against more odds than I expected, to live beside the fresh pool of the heart’s sweet water.” Like a stream, stories are a source of life, they are life. The great gift of Luis Alberto Urrea is his clear, clean and unending commitment to story, to immersing us all in it, and to asking us “See? See how it is?”

**Alison Cuddy**

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## *A Great Modernist*

Luis Urrea is an essential worker for the healing of the American soul. He has expanded the breadth and width of what we think of as American Letters, simultaneously upholding and undermining tradition. He is one of our great modernists--not in flamboyance or dissonance, but in the way he transforms our kaleidoscope into a stethoscope, examining an often overwhelming world of reflected and distorted histories, destinies, migrations and identities to reveal a too often overlooked heartbeat. It has been the singular honor of my career as an editor to have been part of his ascent, and has been a great pleasure of my life to have become his friend.

**Geoff Shandler**

## ***A Lantern on the Path***

I cannot possibly convey the magnitude of influence and inspiration that Luis Alberto Urrea, the man and the author, has had on my own work, and personal journey. Before I ever read his fiction or investigative work, I was an early fan of his poetry, which seemed to capture the essence of what I myself had been trying to discover, a young Chicano searching for purpose, without my knowing. And when later, I first stumbled across *The Devil's Highway*, I knew I had found a lantern on the path toward community and heart-work, or rather, a way to manifest a very real sense of healing via writing, as it pertained to the collective wounds of my family and my community's past. I devoured every book he wrote, at the time, and when I was done, and still found myself hungry, I wrote my own words, sought my own discoveries, and began to carve that road that I find myself on to this very day. To say I am grateful to what Luis, and his life-partner Cindy, have meant to my work, only touches the very tip of the iceberg. I can think of no author more deserving of this honor than Luis Alberto Urrea. May we all benefit from his heart and passion and writing for many more years to come.

**Tim Z. Hernandez**

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## ***Walking with Us***

Luis Alberto Urrea taught me how to listen to my characters with an open and humble heart—to their joys and sorrows, their fears and foibles, their epic screwups, their pain and their love. Through the example of his life as a teacher and his work as a novelist, journalist, poet, and essayist, he taught me that the most important task of the writer is to bear witness, particularly to the stories and lives of those strangers who so often pass unseen and unheard, unloved, unwelcomed. The work of the writer, he taught me, is to say to her characters and her readers, “You are not forgotten.” His stories, poems, and essays are filled with wisdom, beauty, whimsy, humor, heart, and hard truths—with grace and love, always, at the center of every word he puts on the page. He is a wonder, and I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from him. “Words are the only bread we can really share,” he writes. “When I say ‘we,’ I mean every one of us, everybody, all of you.... For I am nobody’s son, but I am everyone’s brother. So come here to me. Walk me home.” Thank you, Luis, for walking with us.

**Elizabeth Wetmore**

## *His Writing Contains the World*

Years ago, I signed up for Luis's workshop at UIC thinking maybe I'd learn how to write a decent sentence. I wasn't an English major, and the course wasn't technically required for anything I was doing at the university. I ended up taking it three times anyway. Turns out it was vital.

Anyone who's read Luis's work knows this award is a no-brainer. His writing contains the world—the delight and the heartache, the knowable and the unknowable, spirit and earth and sky. Like the musicians and the medicine women, he sees things the rest of us don't. But more than that, he shows us how to see them, too.

Luis used to say his workshop was part church, part Grease Monkey. He taught me how to better love the world, and also how to get up under the hood and tinker with a sentence until it purrs. And he is teaching all of us, even now. Not in the clinical way, like a pedant with rules and rubrics, but in the expansive, heart-first way of someone who's fought through the darkness and turns around with a lantern to light the path.

Congratulations, Luis. And thank you.

**Ryan Schnurr**

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## *A Different Outlook*

While the U.S.-Mexico border sits on the Southern tip of this nation, it materializes in the American psyche in the form of ideology, immigration raids, separations of families, and political rhetoric. Luis Urrea has offered us a different outlook to understanding the U.S.-Mexico border; a more humane one. He has put words to paper where human lives come alive at the border. He gives us the language to see the people, who have been impacted by this geopolitical boundary, for all their humanity. His careful attention to storytelling gives many of us writers, academics, activists, and “organic intellectuals” hope that we too can communicate a better world in words and action. As a student and friend of Luis, I say congratulations on receiving this prestigious award Vato!

**Dr. Rodolfo Aguilar**

## ***A Deeply Generous Spirit***

We met Luis shortly after he wrote *Devil's Highway*, this beautiful and heartbreaking story of the border. Maria, who ran the Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights, asked Luis if he would get together for coffee with the hope that he would speak at her benefit. She came away thinking, he's so quiet, he's so reserved, did we make a mistake? Oh, was she ever wrong. Luis spoke at her benefit that year, and twice more in the coming years. He was mesmerizing. Exuberant and full-throated one minute, and the next, so quiet you had to lean forward to hear what happened next. The audience laughed, and cried, and sat on the edge of their seats. Luis has this uncanny ability to use humor to pull us in to the more serious. That humor sustains us, especially in these times of what feels like never ending sorrow at the border. Luis's wife Cindy, warm and generous, never failed to ask what more they could do for immigrant children and families.

We feel so unbelievably fortunate to count Luis and Cindy as friends. He's such a deeply generous spirit, and one can see that in his writing. With warmth and empathy and such a deep honesty, he opens these small intimate worlds to his readers. Through his stories, he uplifts us – and reminds us of our common humanity. And through his friendship, we've both found such camaraderie and support. All we ask of you Luis is that you keep on writing.

**Maria Woltjen and Alex Kotlowitz**

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## ***That's Why I Love Him***

Luis is a remarkable writer and that is not why I love him. Luis is a good man, funny and brilliant, honest and deep. That is not why I love him. Luis's family are marvellous people. He could be a terrible person, but with a wife and a daughter like that he would still be ahead of the game, and that is not why I love him. Eleven years ago he lent me \$20 to buy gifts for my kids at a tourist stand and then for the next 8 months he put up with me sending him photos of people holding up his \$20 in their currency all around the world. He thought it was funny. And that's why I love him.

**Neil Gaiman**

## *It's About Love*

When the musician, Alison Moyet, came out with her album called *Minutes*, she explained the title and the catalyst for the album by saying something like, *We jump too soon. We leave our projects too soon, we leave our jobs and our marriages too soon, and sometimes we leave our lives too soon.*

We expect our entire lives to be filled with those sublime moments, but those glorious moments of bliss, those intense, joyful, moments, “They only happen in minutes, suspended in pedestrian years.”

Don't give up, is what she was saying. Something beautiful might be right around the corner.

In his life, in his teaching, and in his poetry and prose, Luis Alberto Urrea takes the point further by giving witness to the sacredness that is so easy for us to lose sight of.

Do not settle for pedestrian years, he seems to say. Do not settle for pedestrian days. Do. Not. Settle. Every moment of your life is sacred. Look for the sacred everywhere.

I've seen Luis Urrea in classrooms, on stages, on panels, in conversation with authors and critics, and at Mexican restaurants where waiters and guacamole artists fell under his spell.

But when I invited Luis Alberto Urrea to a literary festival at a high school I taught at in January 2012, I told a story about how I once saw Luis on a stage with Sting.

Luis was sitting there, leaning back so comfortably in his chair I wasn't sure he even knew he was on the stage with Sting.

Sting. The musician.

He could not have had this planned, but in his presentation at that literary festival, Luis touched on both of these elements of my introduction.

“The best of your art is prayer,” he said. “It's up to you who you're praying to, but it's a form of prayer. And if you don't put love in your pen, don't bother to write. We think it's about airplanes, we think it's about groupies, we think it's about a million bucks. We think it's about—

(and here, Luis looked at me, because of that Sting business)

—We think it's about Sting,” he said, “but it's not,” and then he laughed that Luis Urrea laugh that says, *Billy, you gotta know better than that silliness.*

“It's about love,” he said. “It's about love. Just remember that.”

**Billy Lombardo**

## ***Building Bridges Between Neighbors***

Luis Alberto Urrea has provided a vital and powerful literary link between the U.S. and Mexico. He has helped these neighbors better understand each other. His writings help us better understand why people leave Mexico, what they will do to get here, and the powerful longing they have for their homelands once they arrive in the U.S. He not only helps people understand a complex and thorny issue that divides us like immigration; he gives this topic nuance and complexity that you can't get in the news. He shows people who are often forced to straddle two worlds and is perhaps most powerful describing the line between the two countries, the borderlands. In *Into the Beautiful North*, his saga shows us that migration comes from a series of events, a long history. In recent decades, the peso is devalued, NAFTA brings gringo corn to Mexico and drives small Mexican corn producers off their land, narcotics cartels control turf to move drugs to the U.S., the largest user of illegal drugs in the world. His characters inhabit fascinating worlds most of us wouldn't otherwise see: Migrants subsisting in a dump in Tijuana. He shows the sorrow Mexican migrants feel in leaving their homelands, the unexpected consequences of that migration [women left in Mexican towns now devoid of men take on new roles and more power]. He shows us something that's universal but rarely discussed in the age of hyper nationalism: the deep longing to go home. To fix what's broken so that's possible.

Luis is a person who clearly loves Mexico and the U.S., and he wants us to love both of them, too. That's a tall order today in the U.S., when so many are told there are rapists and criminals coming here. But Luis has helped so many readers do just that. He is so deserving of this honor.

**Sonia Nazario**

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## ***De Amsterdam con amor...***

Gracias a mi gran amiga Marta por haberme traído a Amsterdam noticias de un cronista del nuevo mundo con una obra muy impresionante. En una entrevista que escuché me di cuenta de su gran capacidad de valorar la humanidad en toda la gente y así, solamente así, poder expresar lo auténtico de los personajes en sus crónicas. Me sumo con ustedes a felicitarlo en este día de celebración.

**Gabriel Sanchez**

# PARTNER TRIBUTES

**Columbia College Chicago** congratulates Luis on this well-deserved recognition by the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame. His work across genres continues to inspire our English and Creative Writing students and faculty.

[colum.edu](http://colum.edu)

Luis is our favorite literary rock star. His visits to **The Bookstore of Glen Ellyn** have been our most fun and successful events. Congratulations and best wishes from all of us at The Bookstore!

[bookstoreofge.com](http://bookstoreofge.com)

Luis is a national treasure. He's a remarkable storyteller but also one hell of a human being! He inspires those around him to also be better human beings. May we all aspire to his level of talent, love and courage. Trinity Ray, **The Tuesday Agency**

[tuesdayagency.com](http://tuesdayagency.com)

How lucky are we to have the work of Luis Alberto Urrea in our lives? He is a master storyteller with a giant heart and the world is a better place for having his words in it. **The Book Group**

[thebookgroup.com](http://thebookgroup.com)

**The Book Cellar** is privileged to celebrate with Luis Alberto Urrea for the Fuller Award. Congratulations, Luis!

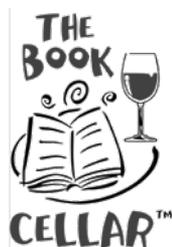
Thank you, SuzyT

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Luis Urrea is, in the best way possible, a blurrer of boundaries—between poetry and prose, between the real world and the mystical world, between insider and outsider as he makes apparent the humanness that connects us all regardless of our experiences and backgrounds. Through his countless workshops, classes, panels, and readings, he bridges the divide between an accomplished author and emerging writers by generously providing instruction and encouragement to the many who work to hone their own writing talents. Congratulations to a wonderful writer and literary citizen on receiving the Fuller Award. **Guild Literary Complex**  
[guildcomplex.org](http://guildcomplex.org)



Luis Alberto Urrea's life has paralleled that of so many Black and Brown artists who have struggled to not only achieve, but to excel in a world that is less than kind to those who are culturally different. His work is heavily infused and colored by his heritage, struggles and unknown personal articulations. His words have enriched our entire world and made it much more vivid, colorful and workable. He has turned his grief and smiles into poetry and prose. He has given us a literature that is steeped in culture and word-music that engages, enlightens and in each of his works is a mini-course for not only survival but success in this world that all too often is not ready for us, his work continues to inspire. Haki R. Madhubuti, **Third World Press**  
[thirdworldpressfoundation.org](http://thirdworldpressfoundation.org)



**Little, Brown** sends hearty congratulations to the maestro, Luis Alberto Urrea, on the Fuller Award! For seventeen years, and across six much-beloved and widely acclaimed books, we have been proud to be your publisher, Luis. Here's to many more books, and to the countless readers whose hearts and minds have been touched, and continue to be touched, by your necessary work.

[littlebrown.com](http://littlebrown.com)



# SELECTION COMMITTEE

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## SPECIAL THANKS

There are too many “great job”s to go around, so we’ll mostly skip the shout outs to those named elsewhere in the program, such as the superstar speakers, generous partners, skillful program contributors, thoughtful selectors, and our all-star board and associate board members. Cate Plys and Barry Jung took on all the hard editing and proofreading for this program—both are so good and helpful in this regard and so many others. Randy Albers also offered editorial wisdom, in addition to other large duties as CLHOF’s president. Eve Moran, as is her habit, pushed in financial support. Amy Danzer willed news of this event to people and places that otherwise wouldn’t have known. Cindy Urrea took on dozens of tasks to help this ceremony and program be what it is—it’s clear that when Luis gives his wife credit as half the team he’s not just being polite. Gregorio Mejia made the extraordinary painting upon which this program cover was designed. Jeff Waggoner, our resident miracle worker, designed this program. Breaker Press, our resident miracle worker’s running buddy, did the printing. Ana Gore contributed research. Rich Kono and Hannah Jennings, as they so often do, performed beautiful technical and design work on unreasonable deadlines. Marta Ayala, in concert with other UIC cohorts, worked tirelessly to ensure that this ceremony and program were as inclusive and spectacular as possible. Luís Duarte magnanimously offered support to make this a better party. Jorge Valdivia and Thelma Uranga, among others at the National Museum of Mexican Art, did all that needed to be done to make this a smooth, pleasant, and vivacious evening. Carey Cranston and the American Writers Museum were instrumental in planning and executing this and other programs throughout our hectic ceremony season. Ydalmi Noriega and the Poetry Foundation also made oversized efforts to elevate the whole enterprise. Craig Davis, Andrea Change, Mike Puican, and Haki Madhubuti deserve extra credit for so consistently and quietly lifting every cause, including this one.

# CHICAGO LITERARY HALL OF FAME



The Chicago Literary Hall of Fame (CLHOF) honors, celebrates, preserves, and promotes the development of Chicago's great literary heritage—past, present, and future. CLHOF seeks to realize this purpose by annual inductions of selected great writers from the past; ceremonies honoring living writers whose lifetime contributions to the literary arts warrant the highest recognition; literary awards to young people; classes, panels, and other literary endeavors designed to encourage the development of writers at all ages. CLHOF also creates written materials that record the lives and works of Chicago's most important literary figures and presents these and other materials on its website, in exhibits, author events, public art installations, literary tours, and programming relevant to the organization's goal of promoting Chicago's vibrant literary tradition and culture. CLHOF formed as a project of the Chicago Writers Association in 2010, and splintered into its own nonprofit 501 c(3) entity in 2014.

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**Visit us at [chicagoliteraryhof.org](http://chicagoliteraryhof.org)**

# OUR HOST: NATIONAL MUSEUM OF MEXICAN ART

In 1982, Carlos Tortolero organized a group of fellow educators and founded the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, which opened its doors in 1987. The goal was to establish an arts and cultural organization committed to accessibility, education and social justice. The museum also provided a positive influence for the local Mexican community, especially since many other art institutions did not address Mexican art.

Over the years, the institution has grown, its audience has broadened, and its reach now extends across the United States and beyond. To support this evolution, in 2001, the museum expanded to a 48,000 square-foot, state-of-the-art facility in the heart of Pilsen and in 2006 unveiled a new name, the National Museum of Mexican Art.

Its mission is to stimulate knowledge and appreciation of Mexican art and culture from both sides of the border through a significant permanent collection of Mexican art, rich visual and performing arts programs, high quality arts education programs and resources and professional development of Mexican artists. The literary arts are included in its robust programming: the museum routinely showcases an array of authors, integrates writers and their words into some of its exhibits, and welcomes local groups for meetups.

The Museum welcomes all people and strives to foster a world where all are included.



## Invest in Our Future

The Chicago Literary Hall of Fame strives to create a community of readers and writers, and to use Chicago literature as a lens through which we see the world. Our history, our passion, our pride, our humanity...it's all there in our literature. More importantly, it's there in the people who love literature.

Ceremonies like the Fuller Award celebrate an individual, yes, but in doing so they celebrate all of us for whom words and ideas jingle our conscience and spark our spirit. We see, on an evening like this, the deep and meaningful connections we all have, and how a supportive culture breeds creation. We need each other: writer to reader, writer to writer, reader to reader, teacher to student, student to teacher, and so forth and so on. We make each other do and be better.

In an ideal world, giving and taking are part of the same fabric. The Chicago Literary Hall of Fame puts forth a robust calendar that includes youth writing workshops, staged readings, exhibits, discussions, awards ceremonies, literary tours, and so much more. We continuously expand our website to make it more and more a primary resource for all things related to Chicago literature. We've zoomed past our tenth anniversary without much fanfare—the pandemic saw to that—but we've never been more optimistic or energetic about all we can accomplish moving forward.

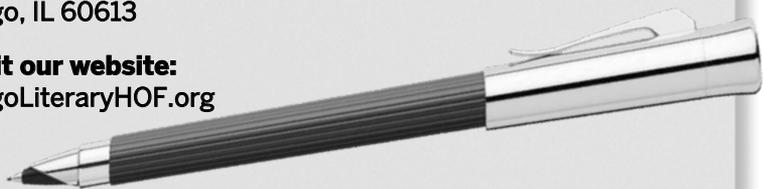
For that, we need help. We rely on contributions from those who believe in our mission and are in a position to support it. Please consider making a donation. Yours would be an investment in Chicago's extraordinary cultural life and a way to help us continue to preserve, honor, and celebrate our city's vital literary heritage—past, present, and future.

### **Send checks to:**

Chicago Literary Hall of Fame  
4043 N. Ravenswood Ave., #222  
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ChicagoLiteraryHOF.org



**SAVE THE DATE!**

# VIRTUAL FUNDRAISER



**FRIDAY**  
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**7:00 P.M. (CST)**

**The program will include:**

- Readings by Chicago authors
- Live auction
- Trivia prizes

*More details to come!*

**Proceeds will help support three new CLHOF initiatives:**

- 1** Educational programming for youth in Chicago
- 2** A poetry anthology
- 3** A video series

The money raised will also go toward costs to coordinate induction ceremonies, lifetime achievement awards, and special exhibits.

**Readings by:**



George  
Saunders



Megan  
Stielstra



Juan  
Martinez

**Live Auction Presented by:**



Archy Jamjun



Kim Hunt

**If you would like to donate something -** an antique typewriter, artwork, first editions, sports memorabilia, company swag, a weekend writing escape - **contact Amy Danzer at [amydanzer@gmail.com](mailto:amydanzer@gmail.com).**

If you are interested in donating directly to the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame, visit **[chicagoliteraryhof.org/support](http://chicagoliteraryhof.org/support).**



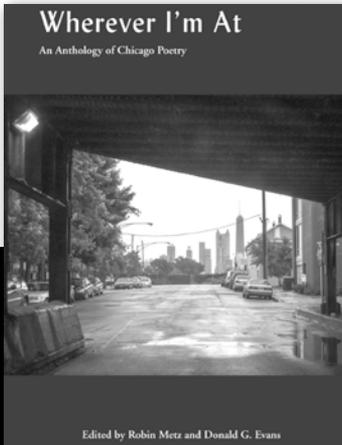
Chicago Classics is an ongoing CLHOF series that features readings of our most cherished Chicago writers and their books.

In addition to several themed virtual events scheduled this year, we frequently add new videos online. We welcome your submission.

Contact Don Evans at [dgevens@chicagoliteraryhof.org](mailto:dgevens@chicagoliteraryhof.org) with your idea and details on how to submit.

[chicagoliteraryhof.org/chicago\\_classics](http://chicagoliteraryhof.org/chicago_classics)

# New Anthology of Chicago Poetry Coming in April 2022



from the  
**Chicago Literary Hall of Fame**  
and  
**After Hours Press**

Watch for updates and details about the launch of this important and exciting book. More to come!

[chicagoliteraryhof.org](http://chicagoliteraryhof.org)

# PARTNER TRIBUTES

“Words are the only bread we can really share.” **The National Museum of Mexican Art** thanks Luis Alberto Urrea for sharing his words, his “bread” with the world and for capturing the Mexican experience through his literature. “On that long westward morning, all Mexicans still dreamed the same dream. They dreamed of being Mexican.”

[nationalmuseumofmexicanart.org](http://nationalmuseumofmexicanart.org)



**The Departments of English, Latin American Recruitment and Educational Services Program, and Latin American and Latino Studies at UIC**

congratulate our colleague Professor Luis Alberto Urrea on his receipt of the Fuller Lifetime Achievement Award from the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame. This honor is only one of many that have been so well-deserved, and we are so proud and happy for you.

*Felicitaciones y nuestros mejores deseos!*

[engl.uic.edu](http://engl.uic.edu) [lals.uic.edu](http://lals.uic.edu) [lares.uic.edu](http://lares.uic.edu)



Congratulations Luis Alberto Urrea on receiving the Fuller Lifetime Achievement Award! What a great celebration of you and your legacy which rests on a body of work driven by attention to craft, rigor, lyrical wonder, and compassion for your subjects.

**The Poetry Foundation**

[poetryfoundation.org](http://poetryfoundation.org)



**American Writers Museum**

The American Writers Museum congratulates Luis Alberto Urrea on this well-deserved honor celebrating his many contributions to American literature. He is a master storyteller and generous artist who uplifts others' work while perfecting his own.

[americanwritersmuseum.org](http://americanwritersmuseum.org)



**Chicago Public Library** is pleased to continue its long collaboration with Chicago Literary Hall of Fame to present the Fuller Award for lifetime achievement to Luis Alberto Urrea. Mr. Urrea's works beautifully express stories drawn from his multi-cultural background. His works have enriched the lives of readers for many years and will do so long into the future. Chicago Public Library congratulates Luis Alberto Urrea!

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