



# The Bilingual Review

VOL. XXXVI • No 1 • April 2024

## La Revista Bilingüe

OPEN-ACCESS, PEER-REVIEWED / ACCESO ABIERTO, JURADO PROFESIONAL

### Los Pañuelos

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*Guerrero!*

Rose calls out our cue

to snatch handkerchiefs from our drawstring bags.

We've been on break, but I start to sweat streams since this region

of danzas is my brainteaser: a juggle of tidy formations, diligent hand

movements & "boys acting as men" footwork. We lead, boys, line up

unruly, twirl pañuelos like tossed pizzas, & prep our caballo step: stomp!

stamp! *clat-tap*—stomp! *tántán!* Most boys get the step fast, no problem

with horseplay, polishing their rowdiness. The catch

is simultaneously twirling a red cloth

so chaotically so consistently

that it twists itself

into grace,

so much like strumming a guitar:

the thrum & thrum until our fingers blush

violently & the strum sings vibrantly. We try to coax

vibrancy. To my side, Adam & Daniel use their right hands

to hypnotize: conjure crimson textile spirals like typhoons of sand

from both ends of an hourglass draining into each other, rebellious & regal.

I am not rebellious. I am not regal. I follow rules without flair—many practices,

Rose tells me I know the steps, but I need to stomp like a man, to pound the ground

like a footloose hard-handed rebel caballero. My dentist told me I have lady hands once—

prodding my gums, she declared my manos petite, delicate as Madeleine or Maria cookies;

my pañuelo refutes. I fling it like a dishrag nunchuck, not unruly enough to find coarseness

to make smooth. My paisley pañuelo crisses & crosses when the song starts, flops sloppy

infinities in the air as my botas hiccup lady-like against the floor. I try to make my steps

macho, man them—until the girls file out in sunset-colored practice skirts, spinning

their pañuelos like Toma Todas in one hand, twirling half their faldas into fragile

figure-eights with the other. I wish to mimic their sway with my right hand, my

writing hand, wish to scribble out whirlwinds of woven blood from my wrists.

I remember this hand is where my art unspools itself, these fingers spin

landscapes into letters; they know the labor of making roughnesses

soft. I recall when my diary entries became poems, dance steps

movements; I make this pañuelo a movement, compose

calligraphy in the air—like a pen, a body.

& when I get the flutter just right,

I wait for Rose to tell me

I have lady

hands.