

TLC Showcase

LEONARDO BOIX

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Introduction to Leonardo's poetry

Gnarl was inspired by my experience growing up in Buenos Aires as a queer person, and as a young Latinx immigrant to the UK. This poetry collection explores issues around gender, identity, myth, Latin American and British folklore as well as politics and an in-depth look at nature. The book is comprised of 40 poems, including sonnets, longer narrative sequences, an ode, mirrored poems, prose poems, triptychs, syllabic poems and ballads, some of which have been published in poetry magazines here in the UK as well as in the US. It is traversed by rhythmic cycles (natural and otherwise), where wildlife play a major part. In some of the poems I interweaved Spanish, my mother tongue.

One of the central poems here is 'Ode to Deal', an ode in 12 sections, in which I relate a year living with my partner on the East Kent coast. It is interspersed with flashbacks of childhood in Argentina during the military dictatorship of the 70's. There is also a long narrative poem; 'Señor de la noche (Lord of Many Names)', where I explore the story of Pombero, a Guaraní myth about an ambivalent spirit still venerated in Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina. In this poem I create Pombero as an aggressive as well as positive force. This myth allowed me to play out many notions of national identities, gender violence, Latin American machismo, environmental anxieties and the surreal and sexual aspects of Nature.

As the poet and editor Simon Barraclough wrote in his report of the manuscript, Gnarl has a "...rich and convincing knowledge of botany in particular and wildlife in general; of certain types of Biblical and mythical inspiration; and a flair with unusual, surprising, almost surreal imagery". "All this is bound together by an abiding sense of otherness (yes, perhaps *exile*) and an imagination interested in what it might mean to be 'grounded' while enjoying its frequent dizzying flights."

I was given the opportunity of presenting my work to TLC as prize for winning the Exiled Writers Poetry Competition 2018. The report by Simon Barraclough was detailed, in-depth and illuminating in all respects, and has been put to very good use.

Gnarl (A Selection), by Leonardo Boix

Pigments *alla prima**

**a painting technique in which pigments are laid on in one application with little or no underpainting.*

Malachite

Hedges of *laurel bonariensis*, chlorophyll
crawling under our shadows
a little boy poisons ants

Carmine Lake (Cochineal)

For a giant red flower eating my family
for an animal lost in a walled garden
or a present on your last birthday.

Azurite

A perfect sub-tropical lake
shining blue arms floating
crema del cielo for us kids to devour.

Ivory Black

His empty eyes.
A scared panther in an Argentine circus
whipped by a General who holds two cherries in his other hand.

Lead White

Mother's body resting
a marble emptiness. Was he
also in there trying to escape?

Lead Tin Yellow

Don't assume this, Oriole.
Circle, circle
an endless, ending Southern Sun.

Vermilion

Within a hollow eucalyptus trunk
me, hiding. A language incision
in the shape of a nightmare.

Copper resinate

On this lawn neatly mown
a verdigris mask. Go back
you aren't an Englishman.

Gypsum

Landscape of white
semen, everything that reproduces
won't.

Lime White

A horse crossing an electric ocean
leather bags, some Spanish books
in a desolate departure lounge.

Naples Yellow

My incorrect sun
it lacks smoothness. I burnt once
trying to reach for your forbidden body.

Bone Black

His insides being pulled
the day he crossed the bridge
and never came back.

Carbon Black

Crows grew only
on this side of the map
omens of a new beginning.

My Mother On a Diving Board

A leap away from becoming ghost.
She stood erect, her bathing floral suit,
sugared marigolds, a petal cap. She knew
it wouldn't last. *¡Saltá, mamá!*—Jump.
Her red blotched arms in precise positions,
her weak body giving way, slowly going
forward. Below her, a mirror reflected

forward. Below her, a mirror reflected
her weak body giving way, slowly going.
Her red blotched arms in precise positions.
It wouldn't last. *¡Saltá, mamá!*—Jump.
Sugared marigolds, a petal cap. She knew.
She stood erect, her bathing floral suit.
A leap away from becoming ghost.

Cycles

"We love the things we love for what they are." — Robert Frost

Blackbird's gone
—until next year's
 bonanza. He left
a simple cup nest full
of dried twigs, hairs
—courtyard detritus
 barely hanging on
a wisteria climber
that never flowers
 its badly grafted roots
compressed, down
into our house's under
 —side. It's been here
since we moved in
30th July, 2009.

—It grew faster, taller
 than we first thought.
Love witness, even these
thunderous wrens
 —*Troglodytes* like to catch
hidden flies, tiny-spiders
dangling over light-green
 —leaves, shoots. These signs
 we've learned to read
every English summer
 —almost by chance.

Syllabic Tales

I-

Now he watches birds until implosion, crystals falling,
 sparks of unknown words
goldfinches
 call—
a liquid song

II-

To the River Plate to see water hyacinths in flower,
 hearts of sun-scorched mud—
once he was
 there
at Quilmes' Quay

III-

For the millionth time returning to his land, to bury
 his dead forebears—
come here, look
 down
at your own past

About the Writer

Leo Boix is Latinx-British poet, translator and journalist born in Argentina and based in London and Deal, Kent. He is a recent fellow of the Complete Works Poetry, a UK national mentoring programme aimed at poets from minority backgrounds. As part of this scheme he was mentored by Michael Schmidt, General Editor of PN Review and Editorial Director of Carcanet Press. Boix is co-director of 'Invisible Presence', an Arts



Council scheme he founded to nurture new voices of Latinx poets in the UK. His poetry has been included in many anthologies, such as 'Ten: Poets of the New Generation' (Bloodaxe), 'Why Poetry' (Verve Poetry Press) and 'American ABCD' (Paripe Books). Boix has been published in the journals POETRY (forthcoming), Modern Poetry in Translation, PN Review, The Poetry Review, The Manchester Review, Letras Libres, The Rialto, Magma Poetry, Litro, SouthBank Poetry, The Morning Star, The Journal of Latina Critical Feminism, The Laurel Review, Eyewear Review, among others. In Spanish, he has published two poetry collections 'Un Lugar Propio (2015) and 'Mar de Noche' (2017), both with Letras del Sur Editora. He was also the first Latino British writer in residence at a London school (St. Gabriel's College) where 70% of the students are from the same background. At present Boix is working with multilingual students on poetry workshops at The Roundhouse, as well as advising The Poetry Translation Centre (PTC) on Latin American poetry.

You can read his website: <https://www.leonardofox.co.uk>