

**José Miguel Curet. *La pérdida es mía*.
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Peering into a House of Pain: *La perdida es mía* by José Miguel Curet

The collection *La perdida es mía*, published in 2018 by José Miguel Curet, follows in the tradition of Puerto Rican resistance poetry dating back to century poets such as Francisco Matos Paoli and Julia de Burgos, whose words were battle cries for Puerto Rican independence. Curet’s third collection builds upon themes established in the powerful first poem, “Mi casa fue un refugio,” such as the state’s assault on the people’s physical and mental well-being, the overarching importance of family and community, and the notion that youth can be painfully marked and interrupted by the national crisis. What the “nosotros” that reappears throughout the collection has lost and cannot

recognize are sanity, general malaise, and the fleeting instances of normalcy (Curet 13). Curet deftly presents poignant imagery of the physical and natural world, the land, the contested territory that surrounded him as a child. Surging throughout with palpable pain and anger at self-serving authority, the poetic voice at times makes the positive elements of Puerto Rican life and culture inconceivable. Nonetheless, *La perdida es mía* offers the reader a realistic elegy for the loss of sanity and stability in the people and places the poet undoubtedly loves fiercely.

Several of the poems, most notably “Mi casa fue un refugio,” “El matorral,” and “No hablo” employ both repetition and apostrophe extensively, in a rhetorical move that draws the reader into the poem while reinforcing the poet’s political struggle. The use of apostrophe in “El matorral” and “No hablo” can be read either as a direct address to someone from childhood, or as the poet asking the reader to recall a different era in Puerto Rican history. Each stanza of “El matorral” begins with with “Te acuerdas” followed by images of the thicket that grow increasingly more graphic with the progression of the poem. The poem elicits notions of a fractured democracy whose shards have penetrated childhood, with verses such as:

Te acuerdas cuando pisábamos la demencia
creyendo que enredábamos la democracia
creyendo que nunca llegaríamos
a la hora de estar con vida
por encima de todos los pies (19)

Here the intertwining of a nostalgic site and its relation to a democracy beset with dementia furthers a pattern established from the outset of the collection. The stanza starts out hopeful, with stamping out dementia, but the speaker then concedes that the collective *nosotros* may never reach a point in time when they can stand proudly and independently. Similarly, Curet prefaces “Mi

casa” with a dedication to “la cordura de todxs” indicating that many lost their tenuous grip on reality at the hands of state surveillance. These initiatory phrases, such as “te acuerdas,” alongside the anaphoric repetition in several other poems, notably “perdimos y desconocemos” in “Mi casa,” and “como hablar” combined with “como decir” in “No hablo,” forge a strong injunction against foreign and local policies; these word choices illustrate how Puerto Rico should be perceived, line after line, much like generation after generation, as a determined yet ailing remnant of colonialism.

This neocolonial aspect is vividly captured in “El matorral” with the mention of “gusanos blancos que después / nos inspiraban la violencia y el embuste” (20). These white worms have infested the speaker and left him and his companions yearning for a more active means of incubating radical change. I believe much of the angst that fills this collection was borne out of the United States’ lack of response to Hurricane María, as evidenced by powerful images of infection, disease, mental disorders, deceit, and solitude. The collection’s final poem, “Otra cosa,” articulates the difficulty of living without networks and infrastructure in the line: “ni la soledad maldita de las redes luego de la turbulencia” (50). This is perhaps the most pointed reference to the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. The collection is so entrenched, and rightfully so, in the depth of Puerto Ricans’ hardships, that it does not really provide any respite or solace from those very conditions, with language that situates the reader in the heart of the crises. However, hope can be found in bursts of imagery in the first and final poems, in the poet’s reliance on the *nosotros* form to illustrate that this is a collective struggle.

The collection of the collective leads Curet to explore externally inflicted pain in a way that challenges the reader. For instance, in “No hablo,” the poet asks “Como decir la punzada, el tajo, el dolor / la absuelta tortura de la violación sin cárcel” (38). By asking how Puerto Ricans begin to heal in the context of a crime like rape going unpunished, Curet explicitly encapsulates

the almost unbreachable gap between the will of the people and the reality of the state. Biting lines like this distinguish Curet's work from those who would wish to make beauty out of the unbearable, rather than gaze directly into the heart of the issues.

The book is divided into three parts which each contain three poems. The first section reflects on childhood while introducing the themes of elegy, a compromised mental state, and the natural world as both escape and metaphor. Couched within Curet's reminiscences are several repeated phrases which point to the personal, political, and psychological impact of pernicious U.S. policies that continue to situate Puerto Rico as a vestige of the long history of imperialism. The second section is perhaps the most graphic, and the final poem of the third section, "Otra cosa," proffers hope through collective expression. In an interview, Curet stated that his grandmother had suffered from mental instability as a result of the constant police persecution and presence surrounding the Casa de Roosevelt; reality seethes through Curet's words and we know we are witnessing a movement, not simply reading passively. "Mi casa" and the following poems trace the daily issues facing the Puerto Rican people with impactful, vivid imagery that lingers with the reader long after the final page.