

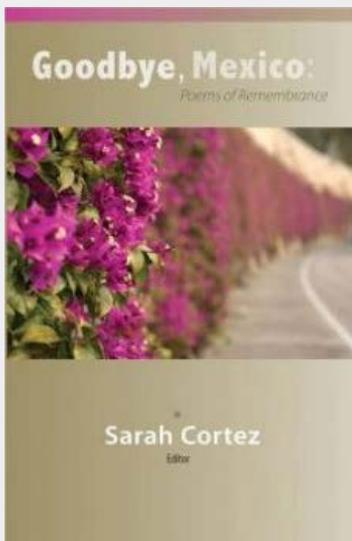
Poetry collection is a portrait of the Mexican soul

BY ED CONROY, FOR THE EXPRESS-NEWS : JUNE 20, 2015

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Goodbye, Mexico: Poems of Remembrance

Edited by Sarah Cortez

Texas Review Press, \$22.95

Cortez has assembled some of North America's finest bards to call to mind and heart again the Mexico they once knew and loved. She will discuss and sign the book Saturday at The Twig book shop.

Many people responded to Cortez's call for contributions, resulting in an edition of 117 works by 46 distinguished poets, including three former Texas Poet Laureates: **Larry D. Thomas** (2008); **Karla K. Morton** (2010) and Jan Seale (2012).

San Antonians will be pleased to know our own **Diane Gonzales Bertrand** and Carol Coffee Reposa, among others with San Antonio roots and connections, are included in the collection as well.

Cortez gave the poets six categories of the imagination through which to approach Mexico, which now form the titles of the half dozen sections into which the poems are organized.

Those imaginative categories invited poets to approach Mexico as a "cradle of myth," a "catch-basin of desire," as "always glistening" and "blossoming a myth," as a "labyrinth of labyrinths" (a la Octavio Paz) and lastly, poignantly as "a broken place."

With such a license, the poets produced a wonderfully varied array of works evoking subjects both classically surreal (such the wandering woman spirit la llorona in all her horrific power and of course painter **Frida Kahlo**) and naturally classical (evocations of pyramids, monarch butterflies in Morelia, the white sands of Mazatlan).

Some of the poets have spent decades living in Mexico and are now on this side of the border, while others have known Mexico best through its literature and art. Some are laconic and epigraphic in their expression, other have tendencies towards the epic.

Some poets approach Mexico through its music, others through its food, while yet others recall how good men often have their lives cut short by "accidents."

The result is a truly kaleidoscopic view of the subtle anatomy of the Mexican soul in all its iridescent colors, something best perceived indirectly through the lens of memory and desire.

For example, Seale's "Transfiguration," a lyrically beautiful ode to an extraordinary orchestral concert, stands next to Thomas' "Mole," a mouth-watering paen to the chocolate sauce that takes innumerable forms.

There is an art to remembrance that arguably finds its finest expression through the voices of poets.

In this time when Texans are polarized on how to respond best to the ongoing humanitarian, political and economic crises in our neighbor Mexico, Houston peace officer-turned-poet **Sarah**

Gonzalez Bertrand paints a vivid picture of an early morning in Laredo, suffused with her hope for its future in “Zaragoza Plaza 6:00 a.m.”

Coffee Reposa also evokes vivid imagery and the divide between haves and have-nots in her “Navigating Mexico,” contrasting a trip through tough, poor streets with her arrival at the green garden of her wall-enclosed hotel.

Curiously, the Virgen of Guadalupe is not a major figure in the remembrances of these poets, ubiquitous as she is throughout Mexican art, literature and daily life.

Still, the spirit of hope and defiance in the face of evil is to be found throughout this book, especially in **Alberto Rios**’ concluding piece “When the Ghosts Stay”: “You have terror and I have tears / In this cruel way we are for each other. / We are at war. You always win. / But I do not go away.”

Sarah Cortez reads from and signs “Goodbye Mexico” from 7-9 p.m. Saturday at The Twig Book Shop at The Pearl, 306 Pearl Parkway.