

R. Joseph Rodríguez

The Spanish Teacher

(variation on a theme by Billy Collins)

Trying to protect his students' inocencia
he tells them if they conjugate verbs correctly
they can become learned across the Américas
and that Pablo Picasso spoke Castillian Spanish
while painting *Guernica* about a famous restaurant.

And that Spanish explorers spent lots of time
on tours of war for gold and to rename indigenous
lands in honor of their wives who stayed home,
like Queen Isabella, spinning a teary shroud,
counting all the days and nights to a listening Dios.

The Spanish expelled no one in 1492, rather they
pushed to sail three ships with honorable names
to feed the world warm gazpacho and tapas for all.
Some students interrupt and ask, "Well, then,
how come España just this year attempted to atone
for 500-hundred-plus-year-old sins? The Jews, Moors?"
"And what about the Basque, then, your excellency?"

The most bullying, hard-headed students clamored
to mute all the inquisitors before them and, as if
by remote control, they acquiesced, since expulsion
loomed until voices quivered and none questioned.

The teacher gathered his devices and placed them
in his murse and—with a wily cybersmile of sorts—
walked gingerly down the hall, exiting the building
into the just-swept streets, wondering if his students
would one day visit España and savor the Rioja wines. [2019]

Source: *This Is Our Summons Now: Poems*. [FlowerSong Press](#), 2022. (forthcoming)