

Cultural Daily

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Carlos Andrés Gómez's *Fractures*

John Brantingham · Wednesday, March 24th, 2021

The wide ranging and devastating effect of toxic masculinity is one of the topics that Carlos Andrés Gómez's *Fractures* explores deeply and richly. Gómez is aware of the danger of the violent urges running through him, and he is trying to move past them even as they are often reinforced as virtuous by our society. Gómez takes these forces seriously in this collection as he takes seriously the anger that rages inside him. This is not a simple force to be discussed glibly. In this collection, he explores this concept, and in all its complexity.

One of the strongest aspects of the collection is the level of awareness that Gómez has in himself. It is not a kind of maudlin and dramatic self-appraisal where he is beating his chest but rather an important look into himself in an effort to find where he is and what changes that he needs to make. It is an examination of how internal and external forces are at odds with the person he is or at least wants to be. In one poem, he writes,

I have watched
my body's primal wisdom

flicker dark as a fist-
concealed palm, ache
so volatile it screams
must. Rage is a language
I unlearn at the intersection

of Ocean Avenue and
Church, no shoreline
or cathedrals in
sight, only glass
decorating a fractured
sidewalk (15-16).

These are "primal" forces, but they are also learned, so it seems that the violence that exists within himself and perhaps within all men are exaggerated by a culture that values those forces over competing instincts that are more peaceful. This is very much a collection of identity and trying to find the right identity to inhabit.

That process of masculine identification is continued through a discussion of fatherhood. Gómez is a father, and he looks back to his own father, who has made mistakes in the past, especially with

Gómez, but he too is in the process of becoming a better and better person. He writes, “Papi, how do I become / half the man you are & not the man you were?” (29). This question is central to so many men, so it expresses the fear that we have living in a world that seems to want us to give in to emotions that are destructive. As he points out, we all have role models of violence and neglect and role models of love. He also is quick to point out however, that those role models are filtered through our own consciousness and that point of view might not be entirely accurate. In “The Afternoon You Moved out,” he discusses that he remembers so many of his father’s mistakes, but knows that he has forgotten much of what his father did well. He also wonders if this is his fate as a father:

I wonder if my daughter will
remember I read to her every single
day I ever spent with her. Or if she
will only remember the times I was not there (32-33).

So while he acknowledges the importance of positive male role modeling in society, he knows that no one is perfect, and he knows that memory is not perfect either. There are certain aspects of his masculine identity that he simply cannot control.

Gómez’s discussion of masculinity does not stop here. He has a complex and nuanced understanding of the subject and his collection reflects that complexity.



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