



The Gravedigger's Archaeology
Poetry by William Archila
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Binding: Tradepaper
Size: 6 x 9; Pages: 112
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Pub Date: March 5, 2015



William Archila

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POETRY

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Winner of the Letras Latinas/Red Hen Poetry Prize, William Archila's *The Gravedigger's Archaeology* plows the terrain of memory and explores a past fractured by the war in El Salvador.

The Gravedigger's Archaeology writes the urban landscape of the US immigrant, a figure constantly reminded of the nameless and the dispossessed who struggle back home in Central America. Moving between past and present, these poems record a vigil of loss left by the emptiness of tedious excavation—both psychological and spiritual. They travel the fragments and vestiges of a war, the return to one's homeland or place of childhood, unearthing the landscapes of a jazz riff, myth, or work of art. In a lyrical, sometimes elegiac language, the poems map the complex territory of an exile who understands the answers lie in the ground.

Praise for *The Gravedigger's Archaeology*

"*Tough music* is the first phrase I reached for in describing William Archila's poems, early Coltrane or perhaps Sonny Rollins or Mingus as analogues. For his dominant (though certainly not exclusive) themes are the almost unspeakably violent world of his Salvadoran childhood and the struggles of immigrant life in the United States, and yet spiraling up repeatedly in stunning riffs of word-song is the rare thing called *duende*, marvelous in itself but also in its evocations of beauty to be found in the life fully lived, the struggle never abandoned. *The Gravedigger's Archaeology* is an aesthetic and moral triumph, and I felt honored to have read it."

—B.H. Fairchild, National Book Critics Circle Award winner

Biographical Note

William Archila is the author of *The Art of Exile* (Bilingual Review Press, 2009), which won an International Latino Book Award in 2010 and was honored with an Emerging Writer Fellowship Award by The Writer's Center in Bethesda, MD. He has been published in *AGNI*, *American Poetry Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and *The Georgia Review*, among others. His book was featured in "First Things First: The Fifth Annual Debut Poets Roundup" in *Poets & Writers*.



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More Praise for *The Gravedigger's Archaeology*

“In his brilliant second book, *The Gravedigger's Archaeology*, poet William Archila excavates the cratered memory of war and its aftermath, his pen chiseling a language of ‘black roosters & fossil bones’ in a lost country, ‘a country rift in half.’ But Archila’s pen is also a spade, as poet Seamus Heaney suggested, and this spade unearths ‘the ribcage / still clinging to its shirt and bodies / dumped in a black lava bed’. This is clandestine territory for the lyric, but it is territory Archila traverses with consummate skill. I have been waiting many years for a book that would guide us through that time and place, exhuming the remains with grace and dignity. Archila has written it.”

—Carolyn Forché

From *The Gravedigger's Archaeology*

Opening stanzas from “Dig”

I can tell you this much because I
always begin with picks & shovels,
pencils & spoons, because I always
return as a worm, six feet below,
breeding a thing of leather & bone,
because the skin breaks over the nose,
belly sinks into a ditch of gas.

I can tell you what rose to the surface
because of the arrowheads washed
& catalogued, because of the mountains
crumpled like butcher paper, graver
& vessel found in the strata, because
of the ravines broken off into chasms,
releasing fossils back into the sea.