



Alabanza: New and Selected Poems 1982-2002

Martín Espada

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Alabanza is a twenty-year collection charting the emergence of Martín Espada as the preeminent Latino lyric voice of his generation. "Alabanza" means "praise" in Spanish, and Espada praises the people Whitman called "them the others are down upon": the African slaves who brought their music to Puerto Rico; a prison inmate provoking brawls so he could write poetry in solitary confinement; a janitor and his solitary strike; Espada's own father, who was jailed in Mississippi for refusing to go to the back of the bus. The poet bears witness to death and rebirth at the ruins of a famine village in Ireland, a town plaza in México welcoming a march of Zapatista rebels, and the courtroom where he worked as a tenant lawyer. The title poem pays homage to the immigrant food-service workers who lost their lives in the attack on the World Trade Center. From the earliest out-of-print work to the seventeen new poems included here, Espada celebrates the American political imagination and the resilience of human dignity. *Alabanza* is the epic vision of a writer who, in the words of Russell Banks, "is one of the handful of American poets who are forging a new American language, one that tells the unwritten history of the continent, speaks truth to power, and sings songs of selves we can no longer silence." An American Library Association Notable Book of 2003 and a 2003 New York Public Library Book to Remember.

"To read this work is to be struck breathless, and surely, to come away changed."

—Barbara Kingsolver

"Martín Espada is the Pablo Neruda of North American authors. If it was up to me, I'd select him as the Poet Laureate of the United States."

—Sandra Cisneros

"With these new and selected poems, you can grasp how powerful a poet Espada is—his range, his compassion, his astonishing images, his sense of history, his knowledge of the lives on the underbelly of cities, his bright anger, his tenderness, his humor. "

—Marge Piercy

"Espada's poems are not just clarion calls to the heart and conscience, but also wonderfully crafted gems."

—Julia Alvarez

"A passionate, readable poetry that makes [Espada] arguably the most important 'minority' U.S. poet since Langston Hughes."

—Booklist

"Neruda is dead, but if *Alabanza* is any clue, his ghost lives through a poet named Martín Espada."

—San Francisco Chronicle

Alabanza: New and Selected Poems 1982-2002 Details

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Michael says

Oh...these poems and this poet - sang powerfully and well. i had come across a poem a few years ago by this author and loved it. But I just began reading these poems of his, this year. What a collection. His use of metaphor and clarity in the service of justice is striking and strong. Every time. He writes and tells the stories of those whose stories would be untold in public places if not for him. These stories need to be told. And I am so very glad I read this.

Ashley says

A collection from my favorite political poet, a former tenant lawyer.

Mamie Morgan says

"For the Jim Crow Mexican Restaurant in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Where My Cousin Esteban was Forbidden to Wait Tables Because He Wears Dreadlocks:

Ash says

A poem from the book, so you can decide for yourselves:

"This is the year that squatters evict landlords,
gazing like admirals from the rail
of the roofdeck
or levitating hands in praise
of steam in the shower;
this is the year
that shawled refugees deport judges
who stare at the floor
and their swollen feet
as files are stamped
with their destination;
this is the year that police revolvers,
stove-hot, blister the fingers
of raging cops,
and nightsticks splinter
in their palms;
this is the year

that darkskinned men
lynched a century ago
return to sip coffee quietly
with the apologizing descendants
of their executioners.

This is the year that those
who swim the border's undertow
and shiver in boxcars
are greeted with trumpets and drums
at the first railroad crossing
on the other side;
this is the year that the hands
pulling tomatoes from the vine
uproot the deed to the earth that sprouts the vine,
the hands canning tomatoes
are named in the will
that owns the bedlam of the cannery;
this is the year that the eyes
stinging from the poison that purifies toilets
awaken at last to the sight
of a rooster-loud hillside,
pilgrimage of immigrant birth;
this is the year that cockroaches
become extinct, that no doctor
finds a roach embedded
in the ear of an infant;
this is the year that the food stamps
of adolescent mothers
are auctioned like gold doubloons,
and no coin is given to buy machetes
for the next bouquet of severed heads
in coffee plantation country.

If the abolition of slave-manacles
began as a vision of hands without manacles,
then this is the year;
if the shutdown of extermination camps
began as imagination of a land
without barbed wire or the crematorium,
then this is the year;
if every rebellion begins with the idea
that conquerors on horseback
are not many-legged gods, that they too drown
if plunged in the river,
then this is the year.

So may every humiliated mouth,
teeth like desecrated headstones,

fill with the angels of bread."

-Martin Espada

Bonnie says

I really enjoyed this book of poetry, they either made me laugh or cry or shake my head in confusion. Took the class at Chautauqua with Mr. Espada as teacher, it was a great time, he can't be described in a few lines. I'll add something later.

Madeline says

I liked most of the poems in this book, but none of them really struck me as amazing except this one. I'm still awed by how it manages to be scary and romantic at the same time.

"When the Leather is a Whip

At night
with my wife
sitting on the bed
I turn from her
to unbuckle
my belt
so she won't see
her father
unbuckling
his belt."

Read it again.

See what I mean?

Read for: Surviving the American Dream

Hank Horse says

I've had the pleasure of hearing Martin Espada read several times, and he's a great poet. Seeing him read "The Prisoners of St Lawrence" with a youth dance troupe and acoustic bass accompaniment a few years ago in Amherst, Mass was one of the most transcendent performances I've ever seen, it left me in tears it was so beautiful. This is an excellent selection of his work, highly recommended.

Ginny says

I never thought I would enjoy political poetry so much. While that aspect was certainly very pronounced, and at first (in Espada's early works) a little off setting, the poems themselves were successful. By that I mean to say that the statement Espada wanted to make didn't interrupt the flow of his poems or the direction they needed to go in.

Being both Hispanic and a recent resident of New York state, I found the poems especially dear to me. Each character in Espada's poems has a name and a history. As I read Alabanza I also felt the importance he recognizes in mankind's individuality and culture, both which should never be generalized or ignored completely but so often are. The impression I was left with after reading was that I needed to pay closer attention to others, that while "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet" there is still such importance in a name because it is a label for one's identity. In his poems I began to see each character as an entire world.

On another note, the imagery Espada creates within the more prose-like poems is dripping with sensual elements. The sounds of the languages spoken, the smell of burnt arroz y habichuelas, the image of palms dirty with soil and blood, etc. all help to place the reader inside the events and moments within his poems. I'll never look at a cockroach the same way again.

Barbara Lovejoy says

I first learned about this author when he was being interviewed on TV a number of years ago about the great work he was doing in schools to inspire primarily minority students to write. It was enjoyable to read some of his poetry.

Cyrus says

A contemporary classic by one of America's most powerful contemporary poets--eloquent, rich, compassionate, with flashes of dark, subversive humor. Espada's experience as a tenant lawyer gives him a distinctive vantage on community, politics, and the working world. The title poem is the finest and most effective poem on 9/11 out there.

Mel says

possibly even better than The Republic of Poetry, but only because it contains so many wonderful accounts as his time as both tenant lawyer and poet.... by far one of my favorite poets to watch here at the G R Dodge Festival, maybe tying with N. S. Nye.

Gorfo says

*"No one asks
where I am from,
I must be
from the country of janitors,
I have always mopped this floor.
Honduras, you are a squatter's camp
outside the city
of their understanding..."*

This is the most unassuming and down to earth book of poetry I've ever read. In *Albanza* you will read about real people and real problems. *"With a voice trained obedient in the darkness of church confessional,"* Martín Espada unleashes a series of poems that are both sardonic and beautiful. These poems document the struggle of Latin American & Caribbean immigrants in the United States of America while also exploring the idea of Revolution, and ending with the question of whether we can ever overcome our rabid jingoism to experience true cultural exchange.

*"and one said with an Afghan tongue:
Teach me to dance. We have no music here.
And the other said with a Spanish tongue:
I will teach you. Music is all we have"*

Emily Wallace says

I had to read and analyze Espada's poems for my poetry and poetics class. This is a thought-provoking collection that brought both tears, laughter, and anger at the prejudices shown to Spanish-speaking people.

Kat says

The title poem brings tears to my eyes. It's a most noble tribute to the victims of violence in Afghanistan and the World Trade Center.

nicole says

Wow, this is an INCREDIBLE collection of poetry by Martin Espada. His voice is such a presence, it sprawls across the page and throughout the book. I found myself laughing and then nearing tears - sometimes within one poem. Amazing work.
