

Cutting the Wire: Photographs and Poetry from the US-Mexico Border

Ray Gonzalez

Lawrence Welsh

Bruce Berman, Photographer

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While politicians and civil rights groups have their day regarding the border between the US and Mexico, it's worth remembering the ordinary human beings who escape the news cycle's notice. *Cutting the Wire*, a timely compilation of poems and photographs, cuts past polemics to deliver a striking view of life on both sides of the border.

The book is neatly divided into two halves, with Mexican poet Ray Gonzalez dominating the front end and American poet Lawrence Welsh filling out the remainder. Editor Lisa McNiel pairs up Berman's photography with each poem in fascinating ways.

Some connections are plain to see, as when a photo of trick-or-treaters in the barrio is matched with Welsh's "Yellow Carnations / Day of the Dead." Others are more suggestive in interpretation, as when Gonzalez's poem "Footprints," which imagines a pair of footprints disappearing into the desert and sands of time, is placed alongside a photo of a freshly married El Paso couple, presumably starting their own journey.

The constant contrasts between each poem and Berman's photography give *Cutting the Wire* breadth and depth. Gonzalez's poems have a keen sense of place and time; he draws parallels that connect the gritty reality of today's Mexico with the mythology of its land and people, as well as his own family history. Welsh's work is more terse and impressionistic, preserving single scenes or moments, whether of an El Paso street at nighttime or the ghosts of dreams that haunt the remains of a smelting plant. Berman's photography displays impressive range, from candid slice-of-life shots to almost surreal collisions of landscape and human-made objects.

Cutting the Wire doesn't provide a straight answer to our social and political troubles at the border; it has different goals in mind. In its observational clarity and its free flow across geographic and cultural boundaries, it makes a compelling case for the communal power of art.

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