Andalusian *Tapas*

Katharine Weinmann

Travelling invites me to expand my awareness and immerse myself in so much that is new – vistas, people, ways of being, food, art, culture, sounds. It's about – as I had been once told by an elderly artist during a layover in Rome – garnering new impressions and being transformed by them. Both to support that change and practice soulful self care, I always journal – creating colourful collages with post cards, brochure pictures, ticket stubs, and other bits of souvenirs to conjure visceral memories. Sometimes, I'll add a quick ink and watercolour impression. And I always take photos to relive my experiences later through my photo books.

Our winter sojourn in southern Spain was one such sensory collage. Particularly memorable in that as we toured Seville and its surrounding hill towns, Cordoba, Granada, and Malaga, word was slowly spreading about a virus named "Covid-19" – one which would soon bring Spain to its knees and the rest of the world to a grinding halt. Homebound and lockdowned for the ensuing years, calling forth memories of our Andalusian holiday buoyed us up – sustaining and cheering us in the darkest hours.

Exceptional weather with only the occasional day of cloud cover, blue skies and sunshine prevailed with warmth that brought spring early – redolent with the fragrance of orange blossoms. From the accommodations I'd selected – perfect in terms of location, amenities, and comfort – to feasting on fine art, flamenco, and architecture, delighted. Sated with *tapas* and *tempranillo*, *Manchego* and *manzanilla*, *gelato* and icy *vermut*, left us enthralled.

Words and phrases overheard took on a new life in vignettes – reminiscent of places visited and savoured. Like *tapas*, those little mouthfuls of artfully arranged local, fresh and seasonal ingredients – palates were awakened for more.

Below, a taste of the hill town northwest of Seville in the Sierra de Aracena.

Los Marines, that welcoming embrace

To be hosted by friends when travelling from afar
brings the heart quickly home to rest.

Fire glowing in the open grill
chestnut kindling burns hot and even
melting winter's mountain chill while
iced *manzanilla* warms from the inside
another remembered welcomed embrace.

Baked courgette and goat cheese stacked
and layered with sweet pimento jam,
quails roasted in tea with Iberian *jamón*,
vino tinto glistens claret in cut crystal goblets,
white damask – the backdrop for fine porcelain dishes,
laden with local specialities…
the slightly-tarnished antique silver knife and fork
rest heavy in my hand.

A soundless night:
waxing sleep under thick and silky feather beds,
held by the waning moon.

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A morning walk in the forest
brings one's footing to settle into the energy
of this new place

enveloped in low cloud and birdsong.
Sheep bells tinkle tunelessly – the herders
hidden among the chestnut and oak-treed hillsides.

Those nuts have fed pigs and people for generations
bringing acclaim to a region known world-wide
for its *jamón*, tasty paste, and flamenco *castanets*.

White stucco villages nestled in valleys suddenly
appear a mirage when the cloud veil lifts
only to disappear when the breeze blows it back.

Cork trees scored around their middles
every decade, their thick bark shorn from below
plugged into bottles of local sherry, *vermut*, and *vino*.
Wild mushrooms foraged for stews and sausage,
oranges gathered for thick and glistening
bittersweet Sevillian marmalade.

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The afternoon *camino* through farm and forest
along paved walk, stone path, dried mud trail

grazing dark pigs come running for hoped-for handouts
snouts sniff through fence, beady eyes shining clear
with curiosity as I mimic their call.

Blackberry brambles now naked until summer
hug old low stone walls.

Sudden splashes of yellow – vivid against silvery green –
feathery globes of mimosa foretell an early spring,
its petals would soon adorn cakes to celebrate women –
a tradition born in Italy, now shared around the world.



Katharine Weinmann is the 2024 winner of Canada's Lawrence House Centre for the Arts' Carmen Ziolkowski Poetry Prize. She has won and received honorable mentions in Off Topic Publishing's monthly poetry contests. Published in several international anthologies and literary journals, Katharine was lead poet and foreword writer for Weaving Hope Through Our Education System (2024).

An intrepid traveler and internationally published photographer, Katharine blogs at A Wabi Sabi Life and conjures one-off, silk-purse culinary specialties from kitchen leftovers. She lives with her husband and their new English Setter, "Walker the Joy-Boy, Wonder-Dog," on the Canadian prairies.