

# DAVID HUERTA

MEXICO (1949–)

LANGUAGE: SPANISH

## FORMAS Y COLORES DE LAS PALABRAS

Escucha una palabra con atención,  
cualquier palabra.

Es puro sonido  
pero algo quiere decir:

Naranja, una fruta;  
avión, máquina que vuela;  
Clodomiro, nombre de una persona;  
Azucena, flor blanca.

Ahora vuelve a escucharlas  
y encuéntrales formas y colores:

¿No tiene espada  
un saborcito metálico  
muy adecuado?

Perfume con esa u  
donde cae el acento  
es profunda  
y azul y verde.

Verónica tiene todas  
las vocales, menos la u.

Carretera rechina  
y serpentea.

Y así por el estilo...



“Poetry is in my blood!” explains David Huerta. As a child Huerta observed his father, renowned Mexican poet Efraín Huerta, write poetry and sketch. In no time at all David was doing the same thing. Always imaginative, he didn’t follow any rules. He wrote anywhere, on anything: cards, napkins, notebooks, a typewriter, and spoke into his voice recorder. Huerta continues to make a game out of writing poetry—playing with sounds, words, meaning, and imagery. After composing, he revises and revises, sometimes hundreds of times, always looking for the music and images in words.

TRANSLATOR'S GLOSSARY		
WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
a (prep.)	used with the base form of a verb to indicate that the verb is in the infinitive	to
acento (n.)	a distinct emphasis given to a syllable or word in speech by stress or pitch	accent, stress, emphasis, pronunciation, intonation, enunciation
adecuado/a (adj.)	satisfactory or acceptable quality or quantity	adequate, appropriate, suitable, fitting
ahora (adv.)	at the present time or moment	now, at the moment, at present, in the present, at this moment in time, currently, presently
algo (n.)	a thing that is unspecified or unknown	something
así por el estilo (idiomatic phrase)	a mode of expression, turn of a phrase, set of words when taken together have a particular meaning	and so on, and like that
atención (n.)	notice taken of someone or something; the regarding of someone or something as interesting or important	attention, be aware, consider, notice, observe, heed, notice
avión (n.)	a powered flying vehicle with fixed wings and a weight greater than that of the air it displaces	airplane, aircraft, plane
azucena (n.)	a bulbous plant with large trumpet-shaped flowers on a tall, slender stem	lily
azul (adj.)	a color intermediate between green and violet, as of the sky or sea on a sunny day	blue
blanca (adj.)	the color of milk or fresh snow, due to the reflection of most wavelengths of visible light; the opposite of black	white
cae (v.)	from the verb <i>caer</i> , meaning to move downward, rapidly and freely without control, from a higher to a lower level	falls, drops
carretera (n.)	a wide way for vehicles leading from one place to another	road, highway, way, route, parkway, thoroughfare

WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
Clodomiro (n.)	a name of a person	Clodomiro
colores (n.)	the property possessed by objects of producing different sensations on the eye as a result of the way the objects reflect or emit light	colors, hues
con (prep.)	indicating the manner or attitude of the person doing something	with
cualquier (adj.)	used to emphasize a lack of restriction selecting one of a definite set of alternatives	whichever, whatever, any
de (prep.)	expressing the relationship between a part and a whole	of
decir (v.)	utter words so as to convey information, an opinion, a feeling or intention, or an instruction	say, tell, mention, speak, utter, voice, give voice to, declare
donde (adv.)	in or to what situation or condition	where
el (m. art.)	denoting one or more people or things already mentioned or assumed to be common knowledge	the
encuéntrales (reflex. v.)	discover or perceive someone or something by chance or unexpectedly	find them, locate them, light upon them, run across them, unearth them
es (v.)	from the third person singular of the verb <i>ser</i> , meaning to be	is, continues to be, persists in being
esa (adj.)	used to identify a specific person or thing observed by the speaker	that
escucha (v.)	from the verb <i>escuchar</i> , in this form it is the imperative, urging someone to pay attention	listen, hear, heed, take heed, pay attention, be attentive, take notice, take into consideration, tune into to
escucharlas (reflex. v.)	to give one's attention to a sound and take notice of what it is trying to communicate	listen to them, hear them, take heed of them, tune into them
espada (n.)	weapon with a long metal blade and a hilt with a hand guard	sword, blade
flor (n.)	the part of a plant that is surrounded by brightly colored petals	flower, blooms, blossoms

WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
formas (n.)	the visible shape or configuration of something	forms, shapes, configurations, constructions
fruta (n.)	the sweet and fleshy product of a tree or other plant that contains seed and can be eaten as food	fruit
la (f. art.)	denoting one or more people or things already mentioned or assumed to be common knowledge	the
las (f. pl. art.)	denoting one or more people or things already mentioned or assumed to be common knowledge	the
máquina (n.)	an apparatus using or applying mechanical power and having several parts, each with a definite function and together performing a particular task	machine, apparatus, device, contraption
menos (adv.)	with the subtraction of	minus, lacking, missing, deprived of
metálico (adj.)	a solid material that is typically hard, shiny, malleable, fusible, and ductile, with good electrical and thermal conductivity (e.g., iron, gold, silver, copper, and aluminum, and alloys such as brass and steel)	metal, metallic
muy (adv.)	used for emphasis—in a high degree	very, extremely, exceedingly, acutely, really, seriously, ultra
naranja (n.)	a round, juicy citrus fruit with a tough, bright reddish-yellow rind	orange
nombre (n.)	a word or set of words by which a person, animal, place, or thing is known, addressed, or referred to	name, handle, moniker
palabra (n.)	a single distinct, meaningful element of speech or writing, used with others (or sometimes alone) to form a sentence and typically shown with a space on either side when written or printed	word, term, name, expression

WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
perfume (n.)	a fragrant liquid typically made from essential oils extracted from flowers and spices, used to impart a pleasant smell to one's body or clothes	perfume, fragrance, scent
pero (conj.)	used to introduce something contrasting with what has already been mentioned	but, yet, nevertheless, nonetheless, still, notwithstanding, all the same
persona (n.)	a human being regarded as an individual	person, being, individual, human being
profunda (adj.)	a very great or intense state, quality, or emotion	deep, profound, heartfelt, intense, fervent, ardent
puro (adj.)	not mixed or adulterated with any other substance or material	pure, fresh, clean, sparkling, uncontaminated, undiluted, clear
que (conj.)	used to identify a specific person or thing observed by the speaker	that
quiere (v.)	from the verb <i>querer</i> , meaning to have a desire to possess or do something	wants, desires, hopes for, fancies
rechina (v.)	from the verb <i>rechinar</i> , meaning a sound or motion that is harsh	grate, grind, creak, squeak
saborcito (n.)	sensation of flavor perceived in the mouth and throat on contact with a substance	sweet taste, delightful flavor
serpentea (v.)	move in or take a twisting or spiral course	to snake, wind, meander
sonido (n.)	sensation perceived by the sense of hearing	sound, tone, noise, intonation
tiene (v.)	from the verb <i>tener</i> , meaning to be in one's possession	have, has
todas (adj.)	used to refer to the whole quantity or extent of a particular group or thing	all, each of, every one of, each of, every single one of
un (m.), una (f.) (art.)	single; just one as opposed to any more or to none at all—used for emphasis	one, an, a, a single, a solitary

WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
verde (adj.)	the color between blue and yellow in the spectrum; colored like grass or emeralds	green
Verónica (n.)	a proper name	Veronica
vocales (n.)	a speech sound that is produced by a comparatively open configuration of the vocal tract, with vibration of the vocal cords but without audible friction; the one most prominent sound in a syllable	vowels
vuela (v.)	from the verb <i>volar</i> , meaning how an aircraft or its occupants travel through the air	flies, takes wing, soars
vuelta (v.)	from the verb <i>volver</i> , meaning turn one's attention back to something	return, come back, go back
y (conj.)	used to connect words of the same part of speech, clauses, or sentences that are to be taken jointly	and, as well as, in addition to

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## PHRASE BY PHRASE

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## REFLECTING AND FINDING MEANING

Group Member Names:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Pick a scribe for the group, and work together to answer the questions.

What are the best parts of this translation, and why do you think they are good?

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What elements of the original poem did you lose in the translation? What did you manage to keep?

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Did you achieve something new with your translation, and if so, does it make sense in the poem or not?

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## BACKGROUND NOTES

### I. About Mexico

- Mexico is the third largest country in Latin America. With 103 million native speakers, Mexico has more Spanish speakers than any other country in the world.
- Before the arrival of the Spanish in 1519, Mexico was home to many impressive civilizations, including the Olmec, Mayan, Toltec, and Aztec civilizations, among others. The Aztecs built their empire around the city of Tenochtitlán, known today as Mexico City. Mexico City is one of the most populated cities in the world, with over eight million people living within the city limits.
- When the Spanish conquistadors arrived in the sixteenth century, headed by Hernán Cortés, they seized Tenochtitlán and claimed the land for Spain. Many indigenous people were killed in the subsequent battle or from unfamiliar European diseases brought by the invaders.
- Mexico was a Spanish colony until 1810 when it officially declared its independence. During Mexico's nearly three centuries of colonization, Spanish became the dominant language.
- Since 1810, Mexico has sought to preserve its indigenous cultures and languages. In addition to Spanish, the country recognizes sixty-eight indigenous languages among its official languages. Today about six million Mexicans speak an indigenous language, which is equivalent to roughly six percent of the country's population.
- Besides Spanish, the most widely spoken languages are Nahuatl (Aztec) with 1.4 million speakers, Yucatec Maya with about 750,000 speakers, and Mixtec with about 500,000 speakers.

### II. About the Spanish Language

- Over four hundred million people speak Spanish as a native language, and there are more than five hundred million Spanish speakers worldwide.
- Spanish is the official language of fourteen countries and the de facto national language of six more.
- In the United States, thirty-five million people speak Spanish.
- Spanish is the second most commonly spoken native language in the world, after Mandarin Chinese.
- Spanish as it was spoken by the colonists in Mexico City was considered the standard throughout the country. The colonists' language evolved into a unique dialect, incorporating Nahuatl words.

### III. About David Huerta

- David Huerta was born in Mexico City in 1949. A modern version of a Renaissance man (gifted in many areas), he is a master poet, translator, editor, social activist, and university professor.
- Since childhood, he has been immersed in Mexico's literary scene. Growing up, the country's most avant-garde and forward-thinking revolutionaries and artists regularly visited his home to meet with his father, famous poet Efraín Huerta. In addition to writing poetry, Efraín Huerta was a political activist and communist who taught his children the importance of equality.
- David Huerta inherited his father's activism. He was present at the Tlatelolco massacre in October of 1968 when, only ten days before the Olympics, anywhere from thirty to three hundred people were shot by the Mexican army while protesting the government's repression of universities. The young David Huerta wrote a poem, "Nueve años después—un poema fechado" (often translated as "Nine Years Later—A Poem Dated"), to reflect on the tragedy.
- Of poetry, Huerta says: "For me, poetry is a spark in the nervous system that can unfold through words—words that are coarse but at the same time fine, and are full of the capacity for resonance, even form; their form is in the ability we have to speak them or listen to them. They are not tangible, but they have form."
- Huerta explains, "The main responsibility of a poet is to make language sufficiently transparent, so that through him we can see the important things that are in the world and in life, and also in death."

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