

FRANCISCO X. ALARCÓN
USA (1954–2016)

LANGUAGE: SPANISH

ANTIGUA CANCIÓN

todos llevamos
en el pecho
una canción

tan antigua
que no sabemos
si la aprendimos

cualquier noche
entre el rumor
de besos caídos

nuestros labios
nos sorprenden
al entonar

esta canción
que es canto y llanto
a la vez



A prolific writer for adults and children, Francisco X. Alarcón was born in Los Angeles, California. When he was six years old, he moved with his family to Guadalajara, Mexico but returned to California when he was eighteen to attend college. He wrote in English and Spanish, and his work celebrates life, bilingualism, and Mexican/Chicano culture. Songs his grandmother sang to him as a young boy inspired much of his poetry. Tradition, culture, and heritage were very important to Alarcón. He explained, “I carry my roots with me all the time—rolled up—I use them as my pillow.”

TRANSLATOR'S GLOSSARY		
WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
a la vez (idiomatic expression)	immediately, simultaneously	at the same time, at once
al (prep. + art.)	expressing purpose or intention for one or more people or things already mentioned or assumed	to the, in
antigua (adj.)	having the characteristics or showing the signs of age	old, ancient, aged, ancestral, time-honored, age-old, old-time, familiar
aprendimos (v.)	from the verb <i>aprender</i> , meaning to acquire knowledge of something by study, experience, or being taught	we learned, we acquired a knowledge of, we mastered, we became proficient
besos (n.)	touch of the lips in a kiss	kisses
caídos (v.)	move downward, typically rapidly and freely without control, from a higher to a lower level	fallen
canción (n.)	a short poem or other set of words set to music or meant to be sung	song, melody, tune, ballad
canto (n.)	musical sounds with the voice, especially words with a set tune	singing, crooning
cualquier (adj.)	used to emphasize a lack of restriction in selecting one of a definite set of alternatives	whichever, any
de (prep.)	expressing the relationship between a part and a whole	of
el (art.)	used to make a generalized reference to something rather than identifying a particular instance	the
en (prep.)	expressing the situation of something that is or appears to be enclosed or surrounded by something else	in, inside, within, surrounded by, enclosed by

WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
entonar (v.)	repeating a rhythmic and/or lyrical phrase by singing	chanting, singing, intoning, resonating
entre (prep.)	at, into, or across the space separating two objects	between, amid, amidst
es (v.)	from the verb <i>ser</i> and is the third person singular present tense of “to be”	is
esta (adj.)	used to identify a specific person or thing close at hand or being indicated or experienced	this
la (pron.)	used to refer to a thing previously mentioned or easily identified	it
labios (n.)	either of the two fleshy parts that form the upper and lower edges of the opening of the mouth	lips
llanto (n.)	a fit or spell of shedding tears	weeping, crying, wailing
llevamos (v.)	from the verb <i>llevar</i> , meaning to support the weight of something or assume or accept responsibility or blame	carry
no sabemos (adv. + v.)	<i>no</i> (a negation) used with a form of the verb <i>saber</i> that means to be absolutely certain or sure about something	we don't know, we aren't aware, we aren't conscious of, we don't perceive
noche (n.)	the period of darkness between one day and the next; the time from sunset to sunrise	night, nighttime, hours of darkness, nightfall
nos (pron.)	used by a speaker to refer to him- or herself and one or more other people	us
nuestros (pron.)	of or related to ourselves	our
pecho (n.)	the front surface of a person or animal—between the neck and the abdomen	chest

WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
que (conj.)	used to introduce a new clause	that
rumor (n.)	words spoken softly using one's breath without one's vocal cords	whisper, murmur
si (prep.)	despite the possibility that	if, whether
sorprenden (v.)	from the verb <i>sorprender</i> , meaning to cause astonishment or amazement	surprise, astonish, amaze, startle
tan (adv.)	to such a great extent	so
todos (pron.)	every person	everyone, everybody, we all
una (art.)	a single person or thing	a
y (conj.)	used to connect words of the same part of speech, clauses, or sentences that are to be taken jointly	and

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

PHRASE BY PHRASE

ANTIGUA CANCIÓN _____

todos llevamos _____

en el pecho _____

una canción _____

tan antigua _____

que no sabemos _____

si la aprendimos _____

cualquier noche _____

entre el rumor _____

de besos caídos _____

nuestros labios _____

nos sorprenden _____

al entonar _____

esta canción _____

que es canto y llanto _____

a la vez _____

REFLECTING AND FINDING MEANING

Group Member Names:

Date: _____

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?

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

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