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The Wake

The first time she sees the numbers
on the arms of the blue-haired ladies,
she wonders why?

The girl sweeps clippings,
scrubs combs and brushes,
counts money and answers phones
at D'Albert Beauty Salon.

What does a teenager know of war?

Not a child,
not adult,
she studies his gentle smile—
even in death
he is good.

This beautiful soldier, son
of a neighbor,
his crisp uniform hides the rope burn
she knows he put there.
He, gone at 19; she going on 15

His mother packs up her grief,
begins a new life, new business:
where the girl takes
a job, busy work to
occupy and distract her
from her own grief at exile.

What I Saw in New York Today, a Found Poem of Sorts

A man on the sidewalk, cutting off skin from his fingers with a scissor
A neat stack of collated boxes, placed on one side, along Madison Square--
 the person inside protected from the oppressive heat of midday July
A soaking wet dog relaxing in the shade of a moist tree
Two wheelies tackling Second Avenue traffic
The Empire State Building in a pink sky
The Verranzo, partially obscured, twinkling in the distance
A very small child in linen dancing near a sprinkler, in sandals
A very large man whose tattoo sprouted beneath a forest of hair
People kissing
A Hasidic rabbi staring in the street

Hombre, Hambre, Hembra

(After Judith Ortiz Cofer's "Beans: An Apologia for Not Loving to Cook")

Too close for comfort
what indeed, do
man hombre
hunger hambre
female hembra

have to do with one another?

El hombre, always concerned about his belly, what good food you will bring him, mujer.

La hembra, the female of the species, always associated with feeding; even her body feeds others.

Hombre, weighty, substantial word usurps the vague hembra. She is at service to those who would use her.
Hembra is not as useful a word as is its opposite--varón

varón--which gives us a most productive modifier--varonil. Not just manly but macho.

Hambre is female . . . despite the article declaring it "male"
Hambre hembra

waiting to be fed with love, kindness, appreciation
waiting for her mouth, her body to be filled
the empty space between her ribs, pelvis, the pits of her palms

Hambre is female . . . like hembra

indistinct, precise
yet unforgiving

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Cecilia Rodríguez Milanés was born in New Jersey to Cuban parents. She writes fiction, poetry and non-fiction. A graduate of the University of Miami and The State University of New York at Albany and currently professor of Latino/a literature and writing at University of Central Florida in Orlando. Her work has been published in The Bilingual Review, Thirteenth Moon, Visions-International and other journals. Her first collection of stories, tentatively titled, My Dead: Stories, will be published by Ig Publishing in 2009.