Border Cantos

—after Richard Misrach and Guillermo Galindo

1 Efigie | Effigy

What road brought you here?
   
   *It was straight but curved  
   like a moon half-covered by shadow.*

Did shadows haunt you
   as you crossed the desert?
   
   *Their footsteps shift rocks  
   the way wind shifts leaves.*

Pain—I imagine too much
   pain:  *wind hollering  
   through silence.*

What draws you on?
   *Coyotes & coyotes.*

Do the ghosts of the desert speak?
   *Their breath wheezes  
   on plastic Gatorade bottles.*

How much pain?
   *Broken jawbones.  
Scars on rocks.  
Bullets in a soccer ball.  
Abandoned clothes  
on an effigy with  
outstretched arms.*

All the dead in the desert
   *like all the dead in the sea.*

The earth swallows bodies
   *back into itself.*

20 days in the desert,
   *20 years to get home.*

Family sounds like
   *wind chimes  
on a breezy  
front porch.*
What do they look like?
   Faceless bodies
   white as moonlight.

What is your name?
   My name’s scattered
   on pages torn
   from a Bible.

Pain—hollering wind
Family—wind chimes
Ghosts—the moonlight reflected
   (remember me)
   on the desert’s
   un-remembering sea.

2  Cucarachas | Cockroaches

Wings. Thorax. Antenna.

The sun scurries
across the sky,

   scratches
   our skin
   red as sand.

Heat like fire ants
on the ripped
carcass
of a rabbit.

No water,
only wind
& the rocks

   shattered
   like bones.

We stitch
our clothes
with cactus thorns.
Our sand-whipped heels burn.

The sun like a cockroach nicks the backs of our necks.

3 Cosas de niños | Children’s Things

Aluminum ladders can be toys like soccer balls can be water jugs

once your coyote’s stabbed holes in them.

How children play:

picking music from broken teeth of a hairbrush.

Twisted sheets of metal, the original toy fence.

A toothbrush can be a toy like gum can be money.

Stay focused! he yells.

& hunger is as necessary as tampons.

Next day, we find scorpions red as blood in a trash can riddled with bullets. How little
imagination
children need

picking scorpions from
their teeth
with tweezers.