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Joe

José Angel Araguz
Linfield College

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José Angel Araguz

Joe

Back in Texas, I was Joe, not José,
my buddies too afraid of the accent
that stood out like a sweat drop
on the brow of a spooked é.
You'd be spooked too if sound
could make an umbrella of your throat

with just one word. With English, the throat
grinds gravel in its shadows. Say *José*
and feel the billow and bloom of sound,
a scissors' snip as the tongue slides, that accent
now a curl on a shaggy haired é,
jet black and waiting to drop.

My friends were ready to drop
classes or pick up teachers by the throat
in Spanish class and fill the room with their gasping 'e-e-e!'
All to avoid saying words like *Porque* or *José*,
as in – *Por qué José no tiene* accent?
But that's exactly what I mean! That sound,

that Tex-Mex, Spanglish, barefoot in the mud sound.
It was enough to make me want the sun to drop
from the sky; in the dark, my skin would accent
nothing. I could live in that black where the throat
swallows tears, drown the José
in me, reclaim and silence that é

that stares back from the page, that é
questioning me with its cocked eyebrow. No sound
sleep in that house where even my mom didn't know José
It's Joe, Mom, not José! and I wouldn't let it drop
until the bird of her voice died in her throat,
all for Joe, dark syllable without accent –



Joe, who went to the land without accent –
college – Joe, who never dropped *E*
but swallowed oceans down his brown throat
straight from brown bottles, who bobbed, blinked at the sound
of glass thudding – Joe, who let his mother's call drop
with her crackling voice asking for not-quite-José –

when *Joe* leaves her throat now, I am lost to the sound.
Each accent is the sound of force, that *é*
would take flight, not drop. *It's me, Mom, José.*

