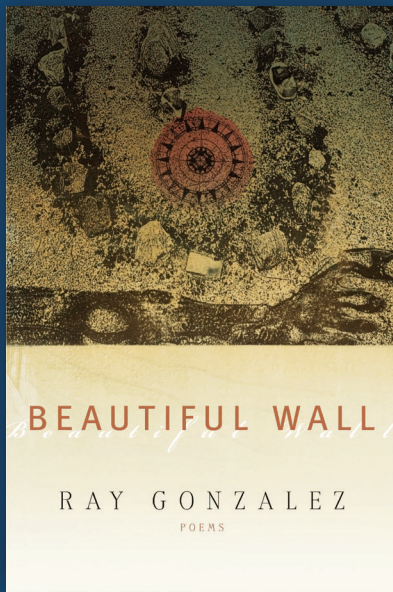


**POETRY WINNER**

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*Beautiful Wall*  
by Ray Gonzalez

BOA EDITIONS, LTD.

**ABOUT THE BOOK**

With the poems of *Beautiful Wall*, Ray Gonzalez takes readers on a profound journey through the deserts of the Southwest, where the ever-changing natural landscape and an aggressive border culture rewrite intolerance and ethnocentric thought into human history. Inextricably linked to his Mexican ancestry and American upbringing, Gonzalez mounts the wall between the current realities of violence and politics, and a beautiful, never-to-be-forgotten past.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



**Ray Gonzalez** is the author of fifteen books of poetry, including previous Minnesota Book Award winners, *Turtle Pictures* (University of Arizona Press, 2000) and *The Hawk Temple at Tierra Grande* (BOA Editions, Ltd., 2002). His poetry has appeared in multiple editions of *The Best American Poetry* and *The Pushcart Prize: Best of the Small Presses 2000*. Gonzalez is also the author of three collections of essays and two collections of short stories, and the editor of twelve anthologies, most recently *Sudden Fiction Latino: Short Short Stories from the U.S. and Latin America*. He has served as Poetry Editor for *The Bloomsbury Review* for thirty-five years and, in 1998, founded the poetry journal *LUNA*, which received a Fund for Poetry grant for Excellence in Publishing. He was awarded a 2002 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Southwest Border Regional Library Association, and is currently a professor in the MFA Creative Writing Program at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. The Southwest desert becomes a character in Gonzalez's collection. What are some of the ways in which he makes the desert landscape come alive?
2. Gonzalez himself has talked about the importance of place in his work. Where do you see that most strongly in *Beautiful Wall*?
3. While Gonzalez has specific poems about Aztec gods, other gods are present in many of the poems, taking the form of animals or poets. In which poems do you see other figures taking on 'god-like' powers?
4. Walls and borders come up in many fashions throughout the collection. How does the way Gonzalez uses the concept of a border in these poems make you understand the depth of the history in places like El Paso and La Mesilla?
5. How do you feel the two poems focused on the poet's battle with depression ("Drums," "Hospital") fit within the larger context of the collection? What are some of the same images or themes that appear in these poems?
6. There is powerful landscape imagery throughout the collection—which poems stood out for you and why?
7. One reviewer called Weldon Kees "Virgil to Gonzalez's Dante" in the poem "Crossing New Mexico with Weldon Kees." How does Gonzalez pay tribute to Kees in the poem, and what do you think he learns from the other poet during the course of the poem?
8. There are several poems in which birds are featured. How do you view Gonzalez's frequent connection with them and the role they play in his poetry?
9. Threads of violence and war run through many of the poems: WWII, the atomic bomb, the Iraq war, and past and present violence in Juarez. Does reading these poems shed new light on historical or present circumstances for you?
10. Music is another strong influence for Gonzalez throughout his body of work, and in *Beautiful Wall* he reimagines the experiences of musicians like Bob Dylan, Don Van Vliet, and Duane Allman. Who are the musicians that evoke strong feelings of nostalgia and connection for you?
11. What were your first impressions when you encountered the title of this collection? What did you think it meant? Has your sense of the title changed after reading the book?

28TH ANNUAL  
**MINNESOTA  
 BOOK AWARDS**

The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide, year-round outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul.

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The publication of outreach materials is supported by the Council of Regional Public Library System Administrators (CRPLSA), through Minnesota's Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.

**"ONE EL PASO, TWO EL PASO" BY RAY GONZALEZ**

Awake in the desert to the sound of calling.  
 Must be the mountain, I thought.

The violent border, I assumed, though the boundary  
 line between the living and the dead was erased years ago.

Awake in the sand, I feared, old shoes decorated with  
 razor wire, a heaven of light on the peaks.

Must be time to get up, I assumed. Parked outside,  
 Border Patrol vehicles, I had to choose.

Awake to follow immigration shadows vanishing inside  
 American walls, river drownings counted as they cross,

Maria Salinas' body dragged out, her mud costume  
 pasted with plastic bottles and crushed beer cans,

black water flowing to bless her in her sleep.  
 Must be the roar of illegal death, I decided,

a way out of the current, though satellite maps never  
 show the brown veins of the concrete channel.

Awake in the arroyo of a mushroom cloud, I choke,  
 1945 explosion in the sand, eternal radioactive wind,

the end of one war mutating the border into another  
 that also requires fatal skills of young men because few

dream the atomic bomb gave birth in the Jornada,  
 historic trail behind the mountain realigned, then cut

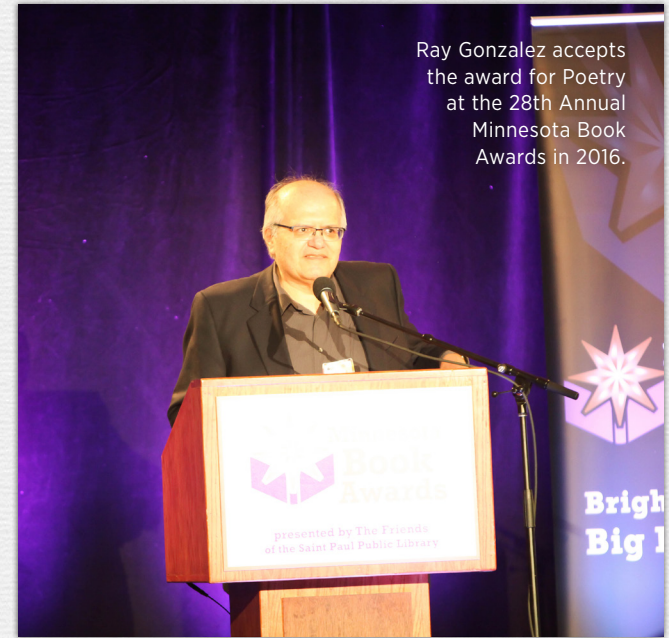
off from El Paso, the town surrounded with barbed  
 wire, the new century kissing car bombs, drug cartels,

massacres across the river, hundreds shot in ambushes  
 and neighborhood soccer games that always score.

Wake up, I thought, look south to the last cathedral  
 in Juarez before its exploding bricks hurtle this way.

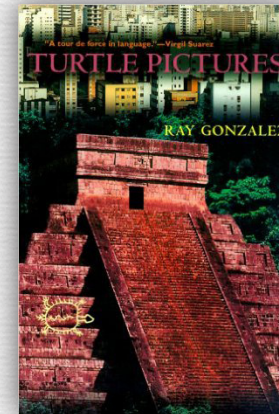
Make the sign of the cross, open your eyes to one town,  
 two cities, five centuries of praying in the beautiful dust.

*Poem courtesy of BOA Editions, Ltd.*

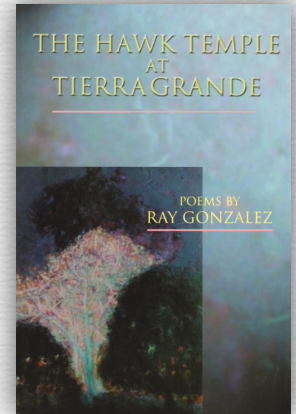


Ray Gonzalez accepts the award for Poetry at the 28th Annual Minnesota Book Awards in 2016.

**Past Minnesota Book Award winners by Ray Gonzalez:**



**2001 Poetry Winner:**  
*Turtle Pictures*  
 (BOA Editions, Ltd.)



**2003 Poetry Winner:** *The Hawk Temple at Tierra Grande*  
 (BOA Editions, Ltd.)