Zacuanpapalotls

By Brenda Cárdenas

(in memory of José Antonio Burciaga, 1947-1996)

We are chameleons. We become chameleon.
—José Antonio Burciaga

We are space between—

the black-orange blur

day of a million Monarchs

on their two-generation migration

south to fir-crowned Michoacán

where tree trunks will sprout feathers,

a forest of paper-thin wings.

Our Mexica cocooned

in the membranes de la Madre Tierra

say we are reborn zacuanpapalotls,

mariposas negras y anaranjadas

in whose sweep the dead whisper.

We are between—

the flicker of a chameleon’s tail

that turns his desert-blue backbone

to jade or pink sand,

the snake-skinned fraternal twins

of solstice and equinox.

The ashen dawn, silvering dusk,

la oración as it leaves the lips,
the tug from sleep,
the glide into dreams
that husk out mestizo memory.

We are—
one life passing through the prism
of all others, gathering color and song,
cempazuchil and drum
to leave a rhythm scattered on the wind,
dust tinting the tips of fingers
as we slip into our new light.


Source: *Boomerang* (Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 2009)