

Jorge the Church Janitor Finally Quits

Martin Espada

Martin Espada (b. 1957) was born in Brooklyn and currently works as a tenant lawyer in Boston. He has worked at many different jobs such as a radio journalist in Nicaragua, a mental patient advocate, an attendant in a primary nursery, and a bouncer in a bar. His writing reflects the diversity of his experience; his publications include the collections *The Immigrant Iceboy's Bolero* (1986) and *Rebellion Is the Circle of a Lover's Hands* (1990).

Journal

How would you expect a church or religious group to treat working people?

No one asks
where I am from,
I must be
from the country of janitors.
I have always mopped this floor.
Honduras, you are a squatter's camp
outside the city
of their understanding.

No one can speak
my name.
I host the *fiesta*
of the bathroom,
stirring the toilet
like a punchbowl.
The Spanish music of my name
is lost
when the guests complain
about toilet paper.

What they say
must be true:
I am smart,
but I have a bad attitude.

No one knows
that I quit tonight,
maybe the mop
will push on without me,
sniffing along the floor

like a crazy squid
with stringy gray tentacles.
They will call it Jorge.

Questions for Discussion

1. Examine the stanza openers: "No one asks," "No one can speak," "No one knows." What point do these phrases make about the employers' perceptions of Jorge?
2. What does the opening stanza suggest about Jorge's identity? What does the speaker mean by "country of janitors"? Relate this point to the "Canmery Town in August."
3. Drawing on your journal entry for discussion, consider the ways in which it is ironic that Jorge's employers belong to a church.
4. Select an image, such as that of the mop, and discuss what that image contributes to the tone and mood of the poem and to the voice of the speaker.

Ideas for Writing

1. Assume the persona of Jorge's boss; then write a response to his resignation.
2. Compare this poem and the previous selection and what they suggest about the work place and work. How are the work places and type of work similar? How are they different? Cite evidence from the poems to support your view.
3. Research laws and statutes pertaining to protecting illegal immigrants from exploitation, such as minimum wage laws. In view of recent revelations about illegal child care workers and others analyze your findings and argue that the relevant laws are appropriate, necessary, not enforceable, or whatever else you may determine. You could report your findings to an appropriate local support group for immigrant workers.

Breaking Silences: Community of Memory

Ronald Takaki

Ronald Takaki is the grandson of immigrant plantation laborers from Japan. He graduated from the College of Wooster in Ohio and holds a Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley, where he is the graduate advisor of the Ethnic Studies Program. Takaki's awards include Berkeley's Distinguished Teaching Award and Cornell's Goldwin Smith University Lectureship. His books include *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*. The following selection is excerpted from the final chapter of *Strangers from a Different Shore* (1989).

Journal

How did your family come to live where you grew up? Did they come for work, or to build a better life, or to follow other relatives? Discuss.