

Poetry and Contamination

by Marcela Romero Rivera

To the untrained eye, all words are the same. A text is just an accumulation of graphemes that carries the intention of communicating something. In recent days, if this hypothetical eye ran over the pages of the newspapers, it would find that all words are in fact always the same, and the message just one.

It is indeed difficult to believe one's eyes these days. Even more so when, after a brief training acquired by daily practice, anyone can see that there are nuances and shadows in that solid block that texts seem to be. There are words that are endlessly repeated and others that are silenced. Let us remember that just two months ago, the White House first organized and then canceled an event in which American poets were supposed to read their work, because their words were

going to express dissent from the official American discourse.

This fashion of keeping poetry outside the limits of the political enterprise is, by no means new; there is a thread that dates back to Plato's *Republic* that tells the history of poetic language being ruled out for various reasons, by philosophers or other non-poets. Certainly, however, the relationship between philosophy and poetry is not as simple as a consistent mutual exclusion. For there is also a parallel history, at least as ancient as that of poetry's expulsion, of examples where politics, philosophy, and science have reached out for poetry to take over—in the form of a quotation or a reference—when the power of these other disciplines' ability to explain things has proven insufficient.

Today, when more than one border is being closed—or at least, severely patrolled—the frontiers between official language and dissenting voices are stronger than ever. Plato's words are being echoed many centuries later. The words of the *Republic* could well be used represent the official stand of the U.S. public policies today:

