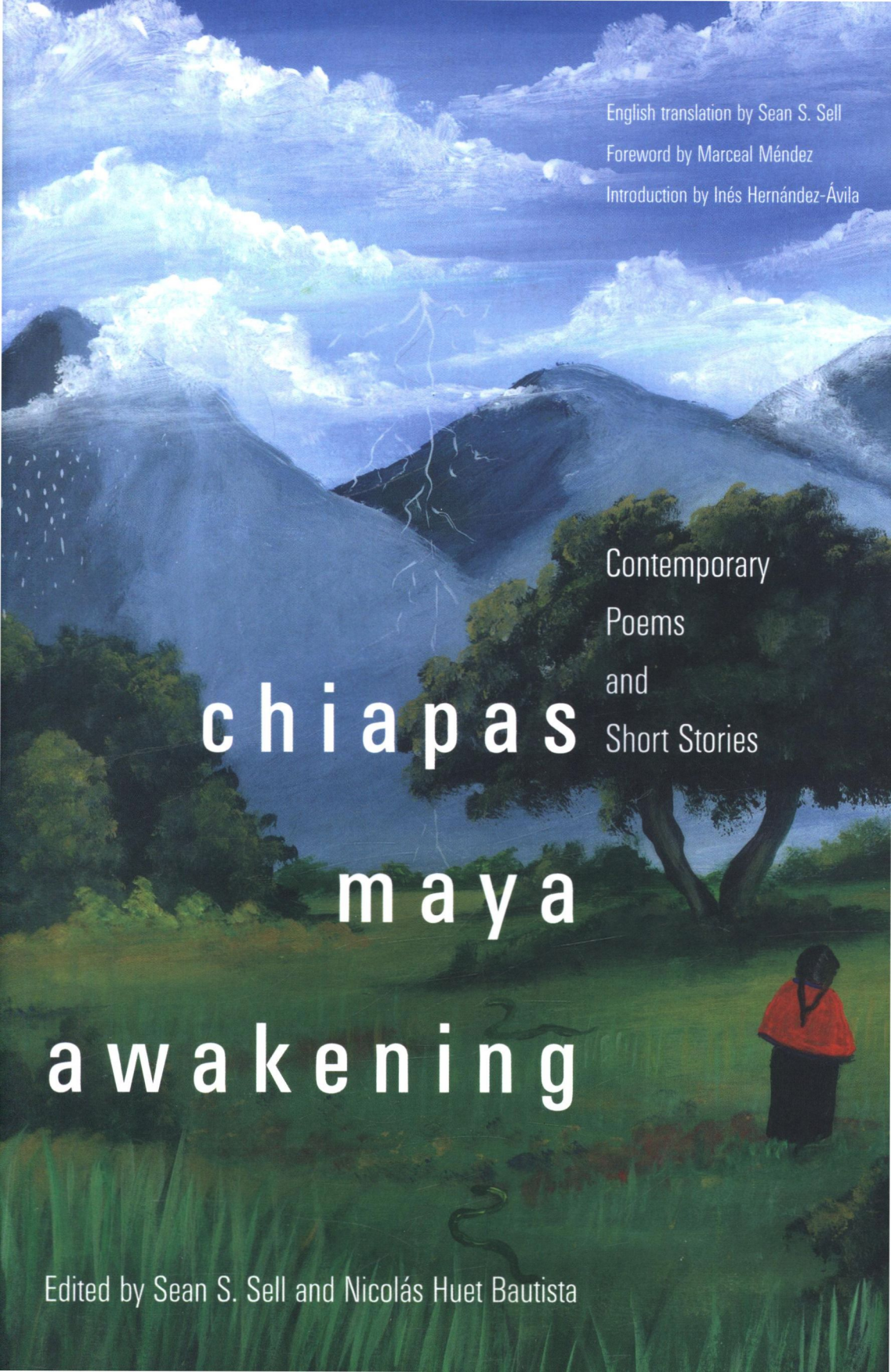


The background of the cover is a painting. It depicts a lush tropical landscape. In the foreground, there is a green field with tall grass. A person wearing a red poncho and a black skirt stands in the field, looking towards the mountains. To the right, a large, leafy tree stands. In the background, there are dark, jagged mountains under a blue sky with white clouds. A lightning bolt is visible in the sky, striking down towards the mountains. The overall mood is dramatic and atmospheric.

English translation by Sean S. Sell

Foreword by Marceal Méndez

Introduction by Inés Hernández-Ávila

chiapas

maya

awakening

Contemporary  
Poems  
and  
Short Stories

Edited by Sean S. Sell and Nicolás Huet Bautista

"*Chiapas Maya Awakening* is a long-awaited contribution to American literature. Readers of all cultural backgrounds will find fertile ground for self-reflection in the works of these contemporary Maya writers, rooted in their oral traditions and in the worlds of their ancestors."

**CHRISTINE EBER**

coauthor of *The Journey of a Tzotzil-Maya Woman of Chiapas, Mexico: Pass Well over the Earth*

**MEXICO'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE** speak a number of rich and complex languages today, as they did before the arrival of the Spanish. Yet a common misperception is that Mayas have no languages of their own, only *dialectos*, and therefore live in silence. In reality, contemporary Mayas are anything but voiceless. *Chiapas Maya Awakening*, a collection of poems and short stories by indigenous authors from Chiapas, Mexico, is an inspiring testimony to their literary achievements. A unique trilingual edition, it presents the contributors' works in the living Chiapas Mayan languages of Tsotsil and Tzeltal, along with English and Spanish translations.

In the book's first half, devoted to poetry, the writers' verses evoke such honored subjects as the quetzal, the moon, and the sea. The short stories that follow address aspects of modern Maya life, including the necessities of survival and the realities of death. Demonstrating that Mayas are neither a vanished ancient civilization nor a remote, undeveloped people, the indigenous writers of this volume claim a place of their own within the broader fields of national and global literature.

**SEAN S. SELL** is a translator and doctoral candidate in Comparative Literature at the University of California–Davis. **NICOLÁS HUET BAUTISTA** is editor of *Ma'yuk st'ílal xch'inch'unel k'inal: Silencio sin frontera*, the Mayan- and Spanish-language edition of this book. **MARCEAL MÉNDEZ** is a Tzeltal writer and scholar from Petalcingo in Chiapas, Mexico. **INÉS HERNÁNDEZ-ÁVILA** is Professor of Native American Studies at UC-Davis and editor of *Reading Native American Women: Critical/Creative Representations*.

*On the front: Quietud*, by Roberto Antonio López de la Cruz, Zinacantán, Chiapas, Mexico. Acrylic on paper, 49 × 34 cm.

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# Chiapas Maya Awakening

## *Contemporary Poems and Short Stories*

Edited by Sean S. Sell and Nicolás Huet Bautista

English translation by Sean S. Sell

Foreword by Marceal Méndez

Introduction by Inés Hernández-Ávila

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# *Chiapas Maya Awakening*





## Foreword

### to the English Multilingual Edition

*Chiapas Maya Awakening* is a significant showing of contemporary literary accomplishment in the indigenous languages of Chiapas; in particular by young Tseltal and Tsotsil writers who, in the act of creating and simultaneously shaping literature, eagerly seek and forge the pathways of their poetic and narrative voices, the same ones that little by little are laying the foundations of a literature arising from “minority” cultures and presenting their different social contexts.

The themes addressed are based on the silence that underlies the apparent calm and submission of the indigenous people, which at the same time break cultural and linguistic barriers forced on them by the impoverished circumstances that keep them oppressed, in search of ways to conduct a dignified, more human life; still not as fulfilling as it should be, and representing a reduced number of people. But the causes of misfortune come not only from outside, from the “other” who has been contradictorily both enemy and leader; they emerge also from among the fellow victims of the overwhelming reality: envy, hate, indifference, neglect, and the bad luck that becomes tragedy, which are inherent in the daily lives of the individuals, the communities, the cultures. The texts collected here give account of this.

The present collection of stories and poems is a sampling of the results of the Seminario de Análisis y Composición Literaria (Literary Analysis and Composition Seminar) conducted in 2007, one of various projects of artistic formation offered to young Maya and Zoques of Chiapas by the Centro Estatal de Lenguas, Arte y Literatura Indígenas (CELALI) and now under the auspices of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples and Cultures. Among the objectives of the seminar was to professionalize the incipient activities in writing and promote publication in the original languages of Chiapas. With this action, they sought to help poets and storytellers know and apply to their

*Editors’ note:* A version of this foreword appeared, in Spanish only, in the indigenous- and Spanish-language edition of this book, *Ma’yuk sti’ilal xch’inch’unel k’inat: Silencio sin frontera*, published in Mexico by the Centro Estatal de Lenguas, Arte y Literatura Indígenas (CELALI; State Center for Indigenous Languages, Art, and Literature) in 2011.

creations the universal tools of literary composition, as well as to explore other possibilities based on the stylistic resources from their mother languages and their “oral literature,” in particular from oral narratives and ceremonial prayers and speeches, and this project is ongoing. In sum, they seek to produce and disperse a literature that defines and reclaims the existence and the creativity of the indigenous peoples in a setting of cultural diversity.

After a decade of hard work on this material, the bilingual literary works have conquered spaces beyond the borders of Chiapas and Mexico; they are achievements that without a doubt represent the commitments and responsibilities of their authors, as well as of the new generations of writers who now, after much effort and dedication, share the fruits of their work to have dialogue with other people, the readers.

MARCEAL MÉNDEZ

Department of Literature and Art, CELALI



## Presentación

### [Foreword to the Spanish/Indigenous-Language Edition]

*Cuentos y poemas: Ma'yuk sti'ilal xch'inch'unel k'inal, Silencio sin frontera*, es una muestra significativa del actual quehacer literario en las lenguas indígenas de Chiapas; en particular de jóvenes escritores tseltales y tsotsiles que, a través del ejercicio de la creación y simultáneamente con la formación literaria, buscan y construyen afanosamente el cauce de sus voces poéticas y narrativas, mismas que poco a poco irán cimentando las bases de una literatura que surge de las culturas “minoritarias” y proyecta sus diferentes contextos sociales.

Los temas abordados giran en torno al silencio que subyace en la aparente calma y sumisión de los pueblos indígenas que al mismo tiempo rompen sus fronteras culturales y lingüísticas, obligados por la situación paupérrima a la que fueron y siguen sometidos, en busca de caminos que conduzcan a una vida digna, más humana; no ya placentera como debiera ser y como la vive un número reducido de personas. Pero las causas del infortunio no vienen sólo de afuera, del “otro” que ha sido contradictoriamente enemigo y dirigente; sino que emergen también de entre las mismas víctimas de la realidad agobiante: la envidia, el odio, la indiferencia, el descuido y el azar que se convierte en tragedia, son inherentes a la cotidianidad de los individuos, de los pueblos, de las culturas. Los textos aquí reunidos dan cuenta de ello.

La presente colección de cuentos y poemas es una muestra del resultado obtenido de un Seminario de Análisis y Composición Literaria realizado en el año 2007, uno de los varios proyectos de formación artística que ofrece a jóvenes mayas y zoques de Chiapas el Centro Estatal de Lenguas, Arte y Literatura Indígenas, antes del Consejo Estatal para las Culturas y las Artes de Chiapas, y ahora dependiente de la Secretaría de Pueblos y Culturas Indígenas. Entre los objetivos del seminario se encontraba el de profesionalizar el incipiente oficio de la escritura e incrementar las publicaciones en las lenguas originarias de Chiapas. Con esta acción se buscaba que los poetas y narradores conocieran y aplicaran en sus creaciones herramientas universales de la composición literaria, así como ensayar otras posibilidades a partir de los

*Nota editorial:* Esta presentación apareció en la versión bilingüe de este libro publicado en México por CELALI en 2011.

recursos estilísticos propios del idioma materno y de la “literatura oral”, en particular de la narrativa oral y los rezos o discursos ceremoniales, y la tarea sigue en pie.

En suma, se buscaba producir y difundir una literatura que defina y reivindique la existencia y la creatividad de los pueblos indígenas en el marco de la diversidad cultural. Después de una década de trabajo arduo en esta materia, las obras literarias bilingües han conquistado espacios más allá de las fronteras chiapanecas y mexicanas; son logros que sin duda representan compromisos y responsabilidades para sus autores, así como para las generaciones nuevas de escritores quienes ahora, después de mucho esfuerzo y dedicación, comparten el fruto de su oficio para dialogar con las personas, los lectores.

MARCEAL MÉNDEZ

Departamento de Literatura y Arte del CELALI



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*The artists created the illustrations that appear in this volume to accompany specific poems or stories and did not provide titles for their pieces. The titles given below indicate the poem or story the image is meant to illustrate.*

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## *Chiapas Maya Awakening*



### Chiapas, Mexico

The writers in this book generally come from the central highlands—Los Altos de Chiapas—at elevations of more than 7,000 feet (2,100 meters). Although the western part of the state of Chiapas reaches the Pacific Ocean, the Sierra Madre de Chiapas range creates a substantial barrier between Los Altos and the ocean.

Overall, Chiapas is rugged, tropical, mountainous, and beautiful.

Map by Erin Greb. Copyright © 2017, University of Oklahoma Press.