

Hummingbird

Symbolically, hummingbirds are healers because of the strength in their wings. At 70 flaps per second, these versatile creatures are capable of radically shifting with exuberance. From a religious perspective, they are heavenly messengers that often serve as a reminder of a loved one who has passed away. I am not a religious person per se, but I do believe in various cultural spiritualities that pertain to animals.

A course reading on gendercide from my Native American Studies class provided more indigenous insight on how the hummingbird symbolizes the transgender caretakers known as “joyas voladores,” or the flying jewels. These “Two-Spirited individuals” primarily assisted the dying with caretaking, mourning, and burying rituals. They are men who dressed in women's clothing and engaged in sexual relations with other men. "Joyas" had soft hearts with nurturing spirits that took pride in preparing a body for a memorial, but also possessed the strength to dig the grave and lay the soul to rest. During the period of assimilation, they were exiled from their community by Roman Catholic priests who viewed their pagan ways as sinful and shameful. Though outcasted from their community and being harshly punished for who they were, the "joyas valadores" still soar among us today.