



# MANDORLA

NUEVA ESCRITURA DE LAS AMÉRICAS • NEW WRITING FROM THE AMERICAS

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# MANDORLA

NUEVA ESCRITURA DE LAS AMÉRICAS • NEW WRITING FROM THE AMERICAS

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ELENI SIKELIANOS  
POEMAS DE PRIMEROS MUNDOS

---

LA MATERIA HA SIDO BORRADA  
DE LA SUPERFICIE  
DE ESTA ESTRELLA V I S I B L E ∞

En mi colección de gluones cuyo color se agrega al  
blanco:

un tiempo el universo

tuvo el tamaño de una cuerda  
ensombrecida; un quark,

un antiquark, rojo + antirrojo, verde + antiverde, o azul =  
blanco. Una pelota de goma, en realidad —(¿Quedaron algunas

infinitudes?) Sí, sí, aún descargan las cajas  
de Coca-Cola a plena luz  
de la mañana invernal, algunos cartones de leche de los de tercer grado en bolsas

de plástico azul esperan en la esquina.  
¿A quién esperan? (A los recolectores



cerca, tocando  
en Jordan, en J, o Jack Quién

puede afirmar que la temperatura del corazón

no es la misma  
que la de las estrellas más calientes (mil millones de grados centígrados) El calor

responde al movimiento. “Si supiéramos cómo se hizo el cuerpo,  
no nos atreveríamos a movernos” (Flaubert), pero incluso él tuvo que hacer haciendo  
con manos visibles.

## CAPÍTULOS DE YO DEFINO LA OSCURIDAD CORRECTA ∞

~ *La velocidad de C*

“¿Humano, escuchaste?

‘La crueldad que empezó con el hombre acabará con él’”, pero quién

autorizaba la lluvia  
del otro extremo

del domo ? ¿Dónde se remata a sí mismo  
en un nudo de azul ? El cielo es una masa  
pesada que fluye

entre el azul y la ausencia  
de azul. Los átomos  
que entraron en las torres

roncadoras —los edificios con alas en sus jaulas— ¿los  
puentes colgantes seguirán  
cruzando sobre los muelles ? Entre las líneas

azules y rojas estaba  
el increíble tendón de Aquiles, el desconcierto  
en el tobillo de una mujer mientras se movía

de un  
lugar al siguiente, en el in-  
terior, a la izquierda, a

la derecha, de cual-

quier modo el ojo  
lo encuentra una debilidad  
detrás de  
las rodillas, tizne

en el depósito  
de carbón. Piensa

oscuro en torno a oscuro galáctico ahora

Piensa Lo que menos

se adquiere con ciencia:

La cara de un hombre

que ya no se reconoce a sí mismo  
cayendo

cayendo con frecuencia

en furia que asemeja una creatura en el matorral de brezo.  
Todo este tiempo pensé que estaba compuesto sólo de una

cantidad  
máxima de partículas —tal como la cadena

de oro enroscada

en el pliegue de su cuello. Mareo blanco piensa oscuro o rojo piensa  
dedos aeroplanos banderolas plateadas sobre el cielo, el ojo  
avizor. Pronto estaré  
situada

en algún lugar  
aquí, muy cerca de una arteria de avenidas  
como seis estrellas, Atmósfera

Dulce,  
la piedra

querría exceptuarse a sí misma de las leyes de la gravedad.

~ *Gozo el objetivo*

Un hombre nos guiaba entre los árboles. Vimos oscuridad en las  
espirales en el lodo, el sol

que caía en su pelo como  
fuegos crujiendo en el sueño "Yo Defino la Oscuridad Correcta", el día

se marchita en el sueño donde el hombre nos

guiaba entre los árboles. Ahí, estábamos perdidos de nosotros, cercados  
entre los álamos, sin espacio de por medio Espesores nocturnos  
de una infancia

brillante compactada en noches  
y días que repiten quien nunca hizo un pacto con las sombras o

Anocheceres, el crepúsculo  
cayó como una sábana de tristeza conduciéndome  
o mi bicicleta a través de la niebla

Sueños de un estado arruinado aún no han tomado cuerpo —Cuándo fui

rota al claro  
desde una fuerza tenebrosa

o el "centro de la tierra" que golpea medio cuerpo; borren toda traza  
de antes o después  
(simultaneidad) oscuramente confirma  
fisuras

Fueron sólo los átomos que se detuvieron por el momento  
Quién puso el enchufe en los humanos  
No pude encontrar ninguna medida común ni tomar cuerpo para cazar  
carros con  
estrellas. ¿Qué es este forro  
troglodita que aferra mi muñeca? (Una peluca.)

Ahora están cavando en el jardín y podemos oírlo desde el hoyo. Que alguien  
estaba perdiendo todo el tiempo su asidero. Pronto, el ubicuo  
manzano, presa de las “membranas del espacio, perfección científica del mundo vs.  
mundo absorbido por un torbellino de relámpagos, o una delgada capa de tejido sobre  
los huesos justo abajo en la parte interna donde está

la médula. Una unidad de lógica y un millón  
toma cuerpo; ¿Qué pasó  
en tu personal histórico?

El pegamento seco que solíamos  
oler

pensando en, como dinero  
antes de eso ella  
y después de eso ella escupió Aquel

animal está descansando.

crema de oro  
crema de plata, vegetales  
malignos, te menciono  
como sopa

Bardo de traspatio, adolescentes  
golpeándose contra las cercas, muchachas  
con agujeros en sus  
calcetas, tobillos  
anchos, digamos  
tío (no yo) una muchacha es  
un hoyo que todos sabemos que

Esto



suenan como la guerra afuera o adentro  
) . Alguien \ perforan

la cavidad.

Asumiré toda la responsabilidad de mi nacimiento.  
Fui mi propio cómplice y adversario.  
Tengo que herir la luz tan pronto aparezca aquel ser nacido  
es una proposición infinita, una crisis

sufrida en mis verbos  
en los límites donde una palabra puede entrar  
en una existencia sólida, una palabra puede entablar  
una relación con otras palabras  
calentadas a calor blanco, un ojo virgen que se vuelca sobre  
casas de dos pisos, Dieci-  
séis y Mission Streets, umbral  
de 10 dólares, un "rayo  
cristalino" llevado a escala humana y sueños quedaron dormidos en Cañón Perdido  
cerca de la

llave de la tina y debajo  
en todos mis cuerpos... Luego, y ... noches

y días que repiten un corazón en relaciones

forenses;... Luego, y yo era joven: ... De pronto.

~ *El festival de los Frères Lumières*

Fue justo antes de la Pascua

cuando tomaron éter de nosotros  
tomaron éter de nosotros  
porque descubrieron que la luz

era tanto partícula como onda, fructi-  
ficando ella misma, viajando  
sola, y hoy día en el metro estaba la huella dactilar de una sombra justo encima

o justo debajo de la clavícula

de una mujer

viajando allá. El pulgar decidió  
describir  
el arco, como una

abeja-  
escuela, cuerda de

apiario fue justo a través de ciertas  
hierbas y las sombras de una  
garganta como luz

como 0.07 Soles

en el  
ojo del horizonte. de  
flama  
fluctuante. de lo

escrito y devastación, cortando  
las *veias* administrativas de los árboles electrométricos; quien hace que el  
pegamento y el oro  
se adhieran a la luz, trastoca el código  
del destructivo

fuego de la tv No el fantasma  
nocturno en las ventanas, y aullido. No el  
aullido aullido. Sólo pequeños  
murmullos de éter como una  
tetera. Como la cocina  
a punto de explotar. Como volver a la oscuridad,  
noche, "Encuentro mis amores durmiendo  
a mi lado", cuenta la historia.

~ *La carne más brillante*

¿Dónde está el centro del sufrimiento

humano? Un pozo estrecho en  
el pozo de la ciudad con la carne  
más brillante irradiando hacia afuera. ¿O de adentro hacia  
afuera, los anillos oscuros alrededor de la ciudad moviéndose  
adentro y adentro? ¿En St. Denis? Un hombre  
por la autopista recoge zarza-  
moras, y ningún vi-

vero floreció sin canción.  
Campos de mostaza silvestre fuera de la sub-  
división del hongo, cada

uno una Flor Debajo del Pie / Sudan / quita las manos  
de mi sueño cuando se esperan cosas tales como “Buenas  
noches” al final del principio del sueño. Alianza

prometida, dijo él, o el dolor  
comienza de nuevo. Viví según mis reglas pero me pidieron que moviera mi cuerpo  
de acuerdo con una serie de movimientos llamados “trabajo” ¿Cuál es el nombre  
ése es el juego, de las esencias de los objetos del dolor? Yo es otro  
nombre para las etiquetas

de lo risible  
[desvíos], contenidos, esto es

Night Road Work, la distancia entre mi trabajo lírico y la mera existencia como un  
camión en

dirección  
a un aero-  
puerto o una mo-  
ra que viene

de un árbol

pero no te come. Ésta misma es comestible si es arrancada  
de la rama donde pudiera estar fija en luz o en  
sombra. Una sombra se sienta  
en el suelo mas un perro o una persona se sienta a ve-  
ces en una sombra que puede

estarse moviendo. El dolor  
se mueve a través de un cuerpo como sombras  
separadas de la rama  
de un árbol y si es arrancado ¿qué

irradia hacia afuera en sombra o en  
luz, en dolor? El fósforo medita

sobre la tensión productiva política o social entre  
resistencia y placer, una substancia

en cinco agregados de lectura atmosférica Algo comienza

con el hipocampo reacomodando

las ventanas en las estrellas o nuestras esposas tal como son, o corremos  
a los principios  
de las ciudades, estirados  
como el lento lémur Las espaldas de nuestros esposos  
extendidas sobre los tiros y los campos de los lotes y entre edificios  
entre oscuridad entre ciudades

~ *Gozo, también*

De pronto una PIEDRA con forma de  
corazón, un corazón real, tan ajetreado

como la hora pico, aquel corazón que encontré en  
una caja, con sangre, en el libro de  
alguien. una PIEDRA con  
forma de piedra como un hábito  
con forma de corazón

el hábito

de una mente que atiende una mano, perdóneme esto ocurrió escribiendo  
una historia de mí misma y

luces de semáforo, camareras

las ventanas de la casa  
pequeños fuegos en las colinas a  
la puesta del sol

ve, ve el mundo está encarnado (la mano) que escribió

un ave su cabeza ahora larga y creciente

Recuerdo un pueblo  
distante, una playa lejana  
          lejana  
todo era blanco y  
explotaba  
          y los árboles eran

gruesos

con hojas

DE NUEVO, MUCHOS AÑOS PASARON. Mientras ahora encima de un campo tan ancho así variadamente compuesto, abracé un período geológico distinto previo al humano que soy. Llevada a los rincones más alejados y puesta en un cohete / casillero, no soy más estos acres de fuerza viviente *figurative coriolis*. Ahora me atreveré a mostrar: No cargo con un golfo tan pequeño, antes de que los continentes redimensionaran el agua, no mido tanto en mis zapatos acelerados. Sobre los lechos de los ríos y las ciudades el corredor me vende unas tierras a un millón la pulgada. Él dice estar en la vecindad de los huesos lustrosos de ángeles mantecosos. ¿Pasaporte azul o verde? Sería como el aire, soy tan rica, pero ahora estamos reclinados sobre los libros como bajo el mandato de la carne de la lengua con la cual te hablo. ☒

*Traducción de Gabriel Bernal Granados*

JAY WRIGHT  
ELEVEN POEMS & A PLAY

---

Seamus knew the shape  
of an absolute past.  
Think of that Aramaic word,  
sitting like a siskin  
                                  in early snow.  
God forgive the man  
his arrogance, his blasphemy,  
                                  or his anxiety.  
What should he show,  
if not the endless  
                                  opening of fields,  
where his presence  
was an offense to other  
birds sitting at Vespers?  
One hears  
the version of an Egyptian  
secretary,  
who, borrowing the black  
and white inscription  
                                  of a desert domain,  
felt the bone order,  
the logical fragility of a

caterpillar  
in an abandoned garden.



If coral could speak to me,  
my gift would be forgiven.  
Take this as a cunning  
state of affairs,  
whatever is made possible  
by grace alone,  
say, that suffering  
occasioned by exhilaration,  
a corrupted intention  
that does not fit.  
Why should I bother  
to match the great order of nature,  
or feel compelled  
to live  
in the geometric  
contradiction some lily intends?  
There is a moment  
when that brief red motion  
leaves the deep water  
for air.



Whatever at this depth  
appears invincible in water  
water enfolds,  
and the spare  
treasures of coral entanglements  
answer the question

electric fish have put  
to a solar intrusion.  
Let the mayfly  
skim the surface  
of its own illusion,  
and the croakers go bust  
in a barrel of muddy fleece.  
These are the sovereignties  
oceans never know,  
and I  
await their containment.



Clever figures lie in wait  
for the innocent weaver  
of the soul's cloth.  
If they were worms,  
they would divest her.  
One must speak sweetly of ambrosial  
springs, those palpable  
endeavors cued by a syntax  
akin to the dead.  
I remind you of the hymnal  
exigencies of the exalted vessel,  
and the sound the Zany Denim  
would easily capture.  
I hope to flow broadside to the current,  
and become a standing pool  
or a meritorious stream.  
These architectural conundra  
sing brotós, blood brooking daring  
that offers no solace.  
But you will recall the Celtic clamor  
that attributed much  
to the enterprise



and most corrupting exchange  
of going naked.



Who would envision  
the counter fugue  
of twilight,  
or the incidental music  
that comes when death  
sounds its leading tone?  
No iambic figure  
stirs the worship of absence,  
but you will hear  
the melismatic advance  
of the perfect solitude.



I would speak of the improbability  
of incarnation, the natural  
body on the wing,  
the self-restraint circuitously  
displayed, the salvaged  
substance become  
a meridian, a parallel,  
that passion called suffering.  
Discretion turns me reticent.  
Lately, I have been adept  
at misreading my body's  
stance, the chance verdict  
the sullen trickster records  
where death will not go.  
Let no one mistake

the expedient origin  
of uplifted moments  
for an unbreakable order.



Egregiously atomic  
anger sits on its flaccid stool  
and watches me.  
A fixed star  
has dropped its pail  
into the thorough silence.  
Whatever was branching dust  
now shows itself immune  
to my urging,  
the last gift  
of a disencumbrance  
love will not allow.  
Singular, salutary friend,  
I wear my little felt cap  
to celebrate  
an indefensible sleep.  
Late now, that fledging body  
scurries to its shelter.



Chipichipi. The wet intention of day,  
a changing light.  
Veracruz sits this morning  
in the safety of mariscos, pan dulce,  
well-bred coffee.  
La loca on the beach repeats her story,  
or the story space has given her.  
Why not sit with la loca,

and watch the city move from east to west?  
Oh, what a clever dance of flowers  
this danzón records.  
And the spell of attention  
required to assess the moment  
when the thunder insists  
                  upon its rights  
in the hummingbird's wings  
seems an investment  
                  in cloud.

I was delighted  
                  when the virgin  
honored me with passionflower pollen,  
and thought,  
waywardly, of the long-flowered  
four o' clock, springing to life at dusk.  
So what, if the dark brings  
                  only the memory of the doublestar  
and the recognition of a home  
                  troubled by my absence?  
I call your attention now  
to the formal intention of a spider,  
weaving a cradle for the rose-haired light.



Speak carefully of the living,  
and cautiously of the dead.  
Don Jorge loves cemeteries,  
and deplores the ice in Boston.  
You think you can do away  
with the fish smell in Veracruz,  
or that you have the coffee  
under control on Madero;  
                  why bother about  
these Cambridge exigencies,

the prunish abilities  
it takes to treat  
with an exuberant  
world?

Uruguayos have my number.  
I have been accused  
of translating Corrientes  
into a milonga  
that no one can sing,  
suffer,  
or understand,  
and few know the batuque  
I have written for my grave.



Wherever the thorough  
bass of despair  
sounds  
someone waits for the wedding  
that mothers who have  
composed night's linear  
progression  
promise to their favorite  
birds



Nothing lies under  
the tongue as sweetly  
as loss  
but there is the astringency  
of ecstasy

## EVIDENCE ∞

Characters:

-Baula

-Croto

-Man in Black

(The light reveals Baula, a large man dressed in a splendid red suit, flowing white hat and red patent leather shoes. He stands among trunks overflowing with old clothes and assorted piles of clothes, from which he draws for consideration and display.)

### Baula

That story was over. What did you expect? They come to me weeping and tearing their garments. (Considers.) Nice touch, that. Tearing their garments. Something biblical about it. A touch of the archaic fills the soul. I say that. Baula. Ah, I'm great counsel. I'm a resource. A veritable fount...nay, someone said that. It's very important to me not to get caught speaking other people's words. Some ass thrust himself in my face. He had a question. How, he asked, could I communicate, if I didn't speak the language of the tribe? Oh, he had a regular song and dance about the beauty of old words, regular words, which had become precious with use, like old stones that the water had caressed. You don't have to be too bright to realize that our man was innocent of philosophy. His confusion of concept, his devastation of predicate was astonishing. Oh, don't get me wrong. I love the old words. I love talking at you. But I am also a lover of precision. I would do anything, go anywhere, for precision. Bueno, I mean I would attend to anyone who would appeal to precision. You know what I mean. Take this overcoat. Extraordinary workmanship. The cut. Look at the shoulders. Note the lapels. And you see how they've closed the buttons away. Attention to detail. Precision. I was saying that the story is over. Who would have paid attention to it? I won't even paraphrase it. I won't summarize it. I won't refer to it. It's dead. Gone. Good riddance. I don't want to hear it, even if it is filled with all those river worn stones, the regular words

that make communication possible, according to our philosopher. You remember the man to whom I referred earlier. But if you've forgotten, it hardly matters. What matters is what's going on here. I'm investigating the style of an era. You see what I've got. One of the sweetest little archives in existence. I'm a gangster. I get what I need. I must admit that's part of that story I told you had come to an end. But you needn't be concerned with that. Look what I've retrieved. Think of the countless stories that wore these very clothes.

(A smaller man, covered with a large poncho, appears. He has a walking stick, and carries a paper-wrapped, string-tied bundle. He makes his way opposite to Baula, stops, sits.)

Quite a climb, isn't it? (Croto says nothing, doesn't move.) You know, of course, that you're on private ground. You do understand me? I'm sorry, I ought at least let you catch your breath. Before you move on. I admire that poncho. If I could find an example, I'd add it to my collection. You must have heard of me. I'm all over these hills, collecting, negotiating, making friends, opening up all manner of possibilities. Surely, you've heard the name. Baula. Notable or notorious, depending upon your disposition. Hey, no one refuses to deal with me. Why, even you. I bet you I could talk you out of that poncho.

Croto

You don't need it.

Baula

There's the misconception. You see me surrounded by these treasures, and you say, he doesn't need my poncho. But, no, sir, that isn't the point. It's not that I need your poncho, but your poncho needs a recognition that only I can give it. You see the distinction?

Croto

Ponchos are only useful to protect you against the weather, or to cover your grave in the end.

Baula

That is an elegant point, though mistaken.

Croto

What if I took it off, and gave it to you?

Baula

That would be too generous, sir.

Croto

Do you think me incapable of generosity?

Baula

Not at all. I distrust my ability to accept such generosity.

Croto

Why is that? Do you prefer to steal, to lurk about and loot dead houses?

Baula

No one has accused me of that.

Croto

Sir, I am in need of another garment. I'm on my way to a wedding.

Baula

Imagine that.

Croto

You didn't answer.

Baula

I'm sorry. I think you've misunderstood. I'm not selling clothes.

Croto

I didn't think you were.

Baula

Good. That's settled.

Croto

So you don't mean to accommodate me.

Baula

Accommodate you? This isn't a village mammy wagon. I'm here for a serious purpose, which you seem set to misunderstand. This is a scholarly mission. (Croto unwraps his package.)

Croto

I must find something to salute your scholarship. Ah. Here we have it. My wife has packed a small bottle of wine. If your honor allows you to drink with someone who has no head for scholarship, or the attributes of the acquisitive.

Baula

Strange. I had you marked as someone of greater dignity and courtesy. Oh, I'm not fooled by dress. I'm a connoisseur of gesture.

Croto

I can tell. You're not from here.

Baula

Here? Where the hell is here? I distinguished this miserable wart on existence by passing through it.

Croto

That would be a terrible insult, if you were from here. But since you're not from here, your dissatisfaction with the earth you stand on doesn't matter. So, you have a museum.

Baula

Not exactly. Do me a favor. No. Do yourself a favor. Come over here. I realize there is a ring of fire around these garments. But just step inside here, and look. Feel the presence that will take you away from yourself. Come. (Croto gets up. He offers the bottle to Baula.) Yes. That would be appropriate. (Croto walks among the clothes.) Sir, you haven't given me your name.

Croto

Croto.

Baula

Croto. I know these hills. That sounds unfamiliar here among them.

Croto

How would you know? Who are you?

Baula

Sorry. Baula. Don't tell me the name doesn't fit. Oh, forgive me. I don't want to, I shouldn't, call your domesticity into question.

Croto

I said nothing about your name.

Baula

So you show yourself more courteous.

Croto

No. You're wrong. It might be a measure of my unconcern. I have a long journey ahead of me. I'm looking for someone who has been even more offensive than you.

Baula

I? How have I been...?

Croto

It would be better if you didn't ask.

Baula

Well, now, a mystery. I suppose I should tremble.

Croto

Suit yourself.

Baula

Strange. That way of putting it. As though I could become like you, as though I could even become you.

Croto

How long have you been here?

Baula

Here?



Croto

Spare me your clever talk. These coffins you display say you've been here a long time.

Baula

Damn you and your coffins.

Croto

Did no one offer to guide you, to help you to see your way without stepping on sacred things?

Baula

I'm not a child. (Croto waits.) I resent these insinuations.

Croto

Tell me a story.

Baula

What?

Croto

Tell me a story. You've been on the path for quite some time. You've been among us. You've heard us talking, singing, quarreling. You've heard us breathing. You've heard the worm in our gut, the one that causes the fart and the slow melting of the heart. You must have heard a story. You must know a story. You asked me to step inside this ring of fire. It is your domain. Prove it.

Baula

What if I don't?

Croto

It's up to you.

Baula

What if I can't?

Croto

That would be unfortunate.

Baula

Why?

Croto

Drink up. There's no need for you to worry about these things. (They each drink from the bottle.) I admire the way you can put things out of mind. Look at you. So well turned out, so orderly. Look at me. A poor man with a poncho that's suitable only for being thrown on a pile and to disappear.

Baula

You are much too modest.

Croto

We define what is modest.

Baula

We?

Croto

The people you've robbed.

Baula

Oh, now I get it. You were listening. You were out of sight and paying attention. You heard me say I believed in impeccable speech. So here you are with these dead words. To test me. (Croto empties the bottle on the clothes.) Why did you do that?

Croto

It's time to stop this dancing. There was a story that came to an end. You owe it to us. Tell me.

Baula

I owe you nothing.

Croto

I'm offering you an opportunity to make a decent ending.

Baula

A decent ending! That's just what he said. He lifted one stone, and placed it. Then two, and placed them. Suddenly, there were six, then ten, then fifteen. He said, I could go on. I could go on repeating myself. The stories go on. The words go on, repeating themselves. It seemed a confusion to me. I didn't need to be contradicted in that way. He began to weave a tale that concerned a dark night in a coastal village, where an ancient theatre lay abandoned. And a man given to solitude stood watching another play at its altar, and the momentary light of death came along the parados to remind us of an unspoken certitude. I said us. Yes, we were there, but it is not our story.

Croto

You must be the one I've been pursuing. They told me you would try to wriggle out of your obligation, but that I should not be deceived.

Baula

Did they tell you to violate the evidence of our connection?

Croto

There is no connection. (Croto holds up a garment.) Your touch? What is that? (He tosses several garments to the ground.) Your orderly contempt for these things? Why should we care?

Baula

Why should you want my story?

Croto

No, no, no. We want the decent ending. You see the distinction?

Baula

What about this wedding? I thought I was to dress you for a celebration.

Croto

Same thing.

Baula

That's an insult. Oh, forgive me. I forgot. You have always been innocent of philosophy, of concept, of predicate. I assume that you will use your poncho to cover me.

Croto

Of course.

Baula

There is something biblical about it.

Croto

That too.

Baula

I had them always in my care.

Croto

I can see that.

Baula


Well, I should be on my way.

Croto

Yes. (Baula starts to say goodbye. Croto stops him.) Not.

Baula

Impeccable.

(He walks away. Croto claps his hands. A man wearing a black suit, flowing red hat and black patent leather shoes appears. Croto and the man begin an amazed and penetrating examination of the clothes. Lights.) 

*Toda gran poesía trata de la verdadera medida de las cosas*  
Richard Heller, *The Disinterested Mind*

En un ensayo titulado “El lugar del poeta en la sociedad moderna” (1966), Wilson Harris declara que “el problema crucial para el poeta moderno...es visualizar una estructura que sea, a la vez, una estructura de libertad y una estructura de autoridad.”<sup>2</sup> Mi cometido en las páginas que siguen será describir esas estructuras de simultánea libertad y autoridad en la obra del poeta y dramaturgo afroamericano Jay Wright, uno de los autores más extraordinarios del Nuevo Mundo. Los primeros cinco libros de poesía publicados por Wright son los siguientes, en el orden en que el poeta sugiere que se lean: *The Homecoming Singer* (1971), *Soothsayers and Omens* (1976), *Explications/ Interpretations* (1984), *Dimensions of History* (1976), y *The Double Invention of Komo* (1980).<sup>3</sup> Asumiendo el riesgo de violar la integridad de ese ciclo, he decidido concentrar mi atención en *Dimensions of History*, que, en mi opinión, mejor ejemplifica el proceso literario antes caracterizado como estructuras de libertad y autoridad. Wright con frecuencia imagina esas estructuras en forma de ciudad, tropo compuesto que traduce relaciones culturales e históricas a configuraciones espaciales, es decir, a escritura. El tropo de la ciudad, muy reminiscente del poema de William Carlos Williams *Paterson*, primero aparece en “Benjamin Banneker Helps to Build a City” (en *Soothsayers and Omens*), especie de introducción a *Dimensions of History*, poema en el que la ciudad como lugar de transformaciones desempeña un papel dominante. Hacer excursiones

frecuentes a otros libros de Wright, muy en particular a *The Double Invention of Komo*, es un necesario, y a mi ver imprescindible elemento de toda lectura de *Dimensions of History*. Es éste un poema que mejor puede ser definido como de “subidos contactos” (“contact-high”)<sup>4</sup> porque *Dimensions* pone en contacto literario “geografías” culturales (es decir, tradiciones que se identifican con espacios geográficos específicos) generalmente concebidas como entidades separadas: Europa, Africa, y las Américas.

El territorio propio de Wright es el Nuevo Mundo, término que empleo muy deliberadamente para substraerle el mayor énfasis posible a las connotaciones nacionalistas que el término “América” ha adquirido por su uso para significar “Estados Unidos.” Si “América” sugiere de alguna manera una área uniforme de estudio, sólo lo hace subordinando todos los elementos culturales que no son de origen europeo a las pretensiones del *establishment* cultural conocido por Anglo-Norteamérica. Por contraste, el “Nuevo Mundo” es lo que Auerbach denominó un *Sinnganges*,<sup>5</sup> que es exactamente como Wright lo concibe: no como una entidad política sino como una “geografía” que deriva su coherencia de una larga historia de intercambios culturales. Esta coherencia lo libera del tipo de falsa unidad impuesta por formas de nacionalismo que en última instancia no son sino pobres disfraces del imperialismo cultural. Wright sin duda estaría de acuerdo con Auerbach en que “nuestra patria filológica es la tierra entera: no puede ser ya más la nación.”<sup>6</sup> Como consecuencia, los muy bien trazados itinerarios poéticos de Wright conducen a territorios completamente desconocidos para la mayoría de los lectores norteamericanos. Bajo la cuidadosa guía de su poeta, o portavoz poético, ese “dark and dutiful dyeli” (moreno y dedicado dyeli), viajamos a las más remotas regiones de la historia y mitología de Europa y el Nuevo Mundo, y a las aún menos conocidas de la religión africana. La extremada rareza se debe en parte a la presencia de contextos tales como las cosmologías Dogon, Bambara y Akan y a sistemas de adivinación Ifa, pero aún más al método poético de Wright. El lenguaje de sus poemas parece al principio familiar, pero visto de cerca empezamos a dudar más y más de que lo que estamos leyendo pueda ser correctamente descrito como “inglés.” Las dudas se justifican: no sólo recurre Wright a varios idiomas, que van desde el español al árabe y las firmas rituales de los Dogon *sigui*, sino que entreteje diversas gramáticas para ampliar la capacidad semántica de la lengua inglesa.

Pero de algo sí podemos estar seguros: la poesía de Wright está obsesionada con la historia, la del Nuevo Mundo en particular. Para ser más precisa, está motivada por el deseo, por la necesidad diríamos, de desentrañar las complejas relaciones entre la historia, el mito y la literatura como formas diversas del conocimiento de sí. Las excursiones del portavoz poético en la obra de Wright se inician por una búsqueda de

un lenguaje que pueda acomodarse tanto al mito como a la historia, que los pueda contraponer sin rendirse ante las limitaciones de ninguno de los dos. Wright caracteriza explícitamente *The Double Invention of Komo*, por ejemplo, como un poema que “se arriesga a la arrogancia del ritual.”<sup>7</sup> Pero al mismo tiempo es importante que entendamos que la poesía, como Wright insiste en otra ocasión, no es ritual.<sup>8</sup> Sin embargo, la poesía puede acudir al ritual, dirían ambos Wright y Harris, “no como algo en que nos situamos absolutamente, sino como una deconstrucción de los engaños de uno mismo implícitos en toda autorrevelación, proceso mediante el cual desenmascaramos a los varios propietarios dogmáticos del mundo en un juego de estructuras y anti-estructuras contrastadas.”<sup>9</sup> Es justamente ese juego de estructuras y anti-estructuras contrastadas (es decir, de mito e historia) que la poesía de Wright pretende articular con rigor lingüístico y formal. Los resultados son espectaculares: Wright es uno de los poetas, en la reciente historia de la literatura, que, para usar las palabras de William Carlos Williams, está “fabricando la masa en que algún Eliot del futuro excavará.”<sup>10</sup> Al ignorar su poesía, la crítica de las literaturas afroamericana y americana desperdicia uno de los instrumentos más útiles para llevar a cabo un genuino proceso revisionista.

Y ¿qué forma debe tomar ese revisionismo, y qué alternativas debe ofrecerle a los rituales establecidos de la moderna crítica literaria y cultural norteamericana? La crítica afroamericana ha cultivado sus propios prejuicios y lugares comunes, que se han endurecido hasta convertirse en una costra impenetrable. Pero semejante costra protectora, hecha de prejuicios, no es sustituto viable para una metodología crítica que reconozca debidamente, en vez de preservar ilusiones de pureza canónica, la naturaleza inherentemente “comparativista” de la literatura afroamericana. Por esta vía, el revisionismo crítico debe realizar, para volver a la frase de Harris, una rigurosa “deconstrucción de los engaños de uno mismo implícitos en toda autorrevelación.” El autoengaño es en este caso la confianza en la eficacia del nacionalismo cultural, manifiesto en el esfuerzo por definir el canon literario afroamericano en un sentido clásico—es decir, como si fuera una literatura “nacional” más. Esta creencia tiende a ignorar el hecho de que el escritor afroamericano es heredero de mucho más que las tradiciones culturales y literarias africanas. La literatura afroamericana es más que una simple cuestión de preservar las llamadas retenciones africanas. Se trata, en vez, de decisiones deliberadamente hechas por el escritor, selecciones que le permiten sopesar valores estéticos y morales diversos, implícitos en cada una de las tradiciones a las que ha tenido acceso en el Nuevo Mundo. Wright ejerce rigurosamente esa libertad de elección y comparación y reta a sus lectores a hacer lo mismo.

Presenciamos en la poesía de Wright el surgimiento de una forma particular de “alfabetismo” que se desprende de su percepción del lugar de la historia afroamericana en el contexto de los patrones más amplios de la historia del Nuevo Mundo. Robert Stepto ha sugerido que la tradición literaria afroamericana está gobernada por un mito “pregenérico,” que él define como la “búsqueda de la libertad y el alfabetismo.”<sup>11</sup> Pero ¿de dónde proviene ese mito? ¿Cómo se desarrolló? Y ¿qué le pasa una vez que el alfabetismo y la libertad han sido, en cierta medida, logrados? A pesar de que la existencia de un corpus nutrido de textos escritos por afroamericanos parece sugerir que estos objetivos han sido alcanzados, la búsqueda continúa y la pregunta entonces no es únicamente por qué sino también cómo. Continúa sobre todo a causa de varias cuestiones vitales relativas a la integración de los textos afroamericanos con la historia, y estas son las cuestiones que los poemas de Wright indagan. A saber: ¿Qué quiere decir para la literatura afroamericana tener una historia propia, poder, en otras palabras, concebir la idea de poseer unos orígenes distintos y suyos propios? ¿Cuáles son esos orígenes históricos, y qué sugieren sobre la naturaleza de las culturas afroamericanas en relación con otras culturas de los Nuevo y Viejo mundos? ¿Qué significa para el escritor percatarse de que existen vestigios que dan cuenta de la existencia de una o varias culturas afroamericanas? Y, por último, ¿cómo afecta semejante acto de reconocimiento de sí el proceso de escribir y leer?

La cuestión aquí no es tanto libertad y alfabetismo, sino libertad *a través* del alfabetismo, tanto como libertad *con* alfabetismo. El alfabetismo, entendido en su más elemental nivel como el poder leer y escribir, concede una forma especial de libertad, específicamente la libertad para generar y diseminar el conocimiento de sí mediante escritos, mediante textos. El alfabetismo, en este sentido, constituye un método de autoconocimiento, que le otorga al escritor afroamericano la libertad para crear e interpretar sus propios mitos sobre la historia. En breve, la misión de alcanzar la libertad a través del alfabetismo es la búsqueda de nuevas metodologías. Que los métodos y metodologías, es decir, las estrategias formales que los escritores afroamericanos han desarrollado desde 1845 han cambiado sustancialmente, se hace ya evidente en la novela de Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, publicada en 1952.

*Dimensions of History*, y por cierto toda la poesía de Wright, es como un epílogo a la novela de Ellison, un epílogo que rompe el cerco que se habían tendido a sí mismas la literatura e historia literaria afroamericanas, representado por el “hueco” del Hombre Invisible. No se puede, después de todo, ignorar que este tipo de exilio autoimpuesto es una evasión de la historia. El trabajo de Wright es, además, un vasto epílogo a toda la historia occidental. Vacía y suplementa la identidad cultural y la

centralidad de Occidente. El concepto que Wright tiene del Nuevo Mundo depende de esta noción de suplementariedad. La dimensión plena de semejante suplementariedad poética queda sugerida por el hecho de que para Wright, la escritura del Nuevo Mundo no es sólo americana y mucho menos estadounidense, sino la literatura de un mundo *nuevo*: "Who is my own if not the world? / Were we not all made at Ife" (¿A quien pertenezco sino al mundo? / ¿No fuimos todos hechos en Ife?"<sup>12</sup> (*DH*, 21). Pero si la visión, o mejor visión doble de Wright, y los textos que genera van "más allá de la geografía,"<sup>13</sup> ese ir más allá no puede entenderse simplemente como un acto trascendental; se trata en vez de profundizar y enfocar mejor la visión. El ángulo agudo de visión que tiene Wright le permite ver cosas que no se encuentran en mapas ordinarios pero que son reales de todos modos por ser invisibles.

Now I invoke my map of beads.  
I coil the spirit's veins about my wrists.  
I kneel at Ocumare to worry  
                                  The saint's bones,  
and rise on the walls Cumaná.  
Poco a poco,  
I cut my six figures  
on another coast, in a western sunrise.  
In Carolina darkness, I push  
my jangada to the blessed water.  
I ask now:  
all the blessed means my journey needs,  
the moving past, the lingering shadow  
of my body's destination.  
I ask for my body to be here.  
I ask for eyes that can invest  
the natural body, the invested land,  
the invested star, the natural spire,  
landscape of spirit and the spirit's  
rise in stone or in the fragile bones  
                                  Of the earth's body.  
This will be my secular rosary,  
my votive map, my guidebook  
to the deeper mines of destiny. (302)



(Invoco ahora mi mapa de cuentas./ Amarrro las venas del espíritu en mis muñecas./ Me hincó ante Ocumare para acosar / los huesos del santo,/ y subir a los muros de Cuamaná./ *Poco a poco*,/ tallo mis seis figuras/ en otra costa, en un alba al oeste./ En la oscuridad de las Carolinas, empujo/ mi jangada hacia el agua bendita./ Ahora pregunto:/ todas los útiles sagrados que mi viaje exige,/ son el pasado móvil, la sombra abandonada / del destino de mi cuerpo./ Le pido a mi cuerpo que esté allí; / pido ojos que otorguen / el cuerpo natural, la tierra investida, / la estrella investida, flecha natural del templo,/ ámbito de los espíritus y los espíritus / se elevan pétreos o como los frágiles huesos/ del cuerpo de la tierra./ Este será mi rosario secular, / mi mapa votivo, mi guía / por las minas más profundas del destino.)

La geografía cartografiada aquí es un paisaje interior investido con varias manifestaciones de la historia y del mito, ensartados como un “rosario secular.” El paisaje espiritual de Wright recuerda el poema “El apellido,” de Nicolás Guillén, con su ignota “geografía llena de oscuros montes,/de hondos y amargos valles.”<sup>14</sup> Los “montes” de Guillén pueden verse mejor como “espacios,” o “claros,” porque la palabra también evoca el concepto afrocubano de “monte,” un lugar sagrado que frecuentemente aparece como un “claro de bosque.”<sup>15</sup> No me cabe duda de que haya una relación entre los “montes” de Guillén y los claros textuales de Wright. Más aún, el “mapa de cuentas” es evidentemente una variante metafórica de esa interminable hilera de apellidos que Guillén ofrece al final de “El apellido” para desplazar la figura del cordón umbilical y así desmontar, como hace el propio Wright, el imperativo genealógico que se supone conecta al escritor afroamericano con sus orígenes en el África.

Las alusiones a la poesía de Guillén en la anterior cita, así como las referencias de Wright a las antiguas ciudades venezolanas de Ocumare y Cumaná, facilitan la transición de las explícitas relaciones de *Dimensions of History* con sus elegidas afinidades latinoamericanas e hispánicas. Semejante transición no puede ser completa porque estos dos *Kulturkreise* no son entidades separadas sino que tiene una larga historia de intersecciones a las que el poema acude en toda su extensión. Doy aquí yo con otro juego de referencias culturales e históricas, que afectan la consistencia de la textura del poema de manera que se hace imposible concebir la literatura afroamericana únicamente en términos de su legado africano. Las figuras e imágenes que Wright proyecta se hacen agresivamente raras a medida que su “Black limbo” (limbo negro) empieza a incluir elementos hispanoamericanos e indoamericanos. Decidido a

demostrar que no hay pretexto válido para no conocer otras culturas, Wright nos sacude y saca de la autocomplacencia e indiferencia que se derivan del trato con lo familiar y nos fuerza a experimentar, a través del acto de la lectura, el dolor, la angustia y la inquietud, pero también el éxtasis del conocimiento y del parentesco especial que ese conocimiento facilita. Los poemas de Wright son las razones de “a heart that is stirred/ from its foundations, and tormented with its/ ceaseless conflagrations” (un corazón conmovido/ desde sus cimientos, y atormentado por sus/ incesantes conflagraciones) (232). Pero ese corazón es también capaz de curar sus heridas reconociendo la necesidad histórica de su ordalía: “Anochecí enfermo amanecí bueno.” Este verso, en español, se repite con la primera persona del singular significativamente cambiada a la primera del plural para preservar la identidad plural del sujeto:

Still, anohecimos enfermo    amanecemos bueno,  
learning the dwelling place of the act,  
the spirit holding the understanding  
of our life among ourselves. (255)

(Pero, anohecimos enfermo    amanecemos bueno,/ descubriendo la morada del acto,/ del espíritu atesorando el entendimiento/ de la vida entre nosotros.)

Todo esto puede parecer bastante fácil de entender si no fuera por el hecho de que “la morada del acto,” el sitio de las transformaciones que motiva tanto la ruptura como la curación se encuentra precisamente en el espacio que se abre entre “anohecimos enfermo” y “amanecemos bueno.” Comprimida en ese espacio hay toda una geografía poética que intenta *trazar en el mapa* el camino que conduce de la enfermedad a la salud, esto es, del exilio a la comunidad. El uso que hace Wright *de amanecer* y *anochece* da la clave de esa “geografía”; explica cómo se ensartan las “cuentas” para formar un mapa.

Ambos verbos se emplean, como advierte Wright en sus notas en el apéndice a la primera edición de *Dimensions of History*, para apuntar a una sutil influencia árabe en la lengua y cultura españolas. Como tanto *amanecer* como *anochece* tienen raíces indudablemente latinas, la influencia no es etimológica, sino, como Américo Castro ha demostrado, una que se refleja en el uso del lenguaje. Lo que resulta raro en esos dos verbos en el contexto de las lenguas romances es la adopción de una conjugación personal: por ejemplo, *amanezco* o *amanecí*, el pasado que usa Wright. Castro explica que: “...el injerto árabe se produce, no sobre nociones objetivas

(*hidalgo*, etc.), sino sobre la misma experiencia interna, sobre la forma de comportarse interiormente al expresar la existencia de un fenómeno natural (se hace de día, o de noche), el alma de la persona transforma lo percibido en creación propia, en algo que acontece dentro y no sólo fuera de la persona: *anochecí*, se hizo de noche en mí, y yo me hice noche.”<sup>16</sup> La idea de un entrelazamiento íntimo del objeto con la experiencia de ese objeto es esencial en el concepto que tiene Wright de la realidad histórica, y resulta significativo que los comentarios de Castro invoquen los de J. B. Danquah sobre la reconciliación de lo dado con la experiencia de lo dado como una de las bases de la noción Akan de la vida.

Wright ofrece *anochecer* y *amanecer* como ejemplos representativos de la manera en que el intercambio cultural y la síntesis se manifiestan en el lenguaje, de cómo afectan “la morada” de un pueblo, frase que el poeta toma en préstamo de Castro. La insistencia de Wright en usar el español en vez de una traducción al inglés es comprensible a la luz de la pobreza semántica de “I went to bed sick and I woke up well,” verso totalmente incapaz de preservar ninguna de las resonancias histórico-culturales y la profundidad filológica del original. Para explorar un poco más esas resonancias, vale la pena considerar los siguientes versos de Octavio Paz en *Piedra de sol* (1957), que se destacan porque Paz, como Wright, usa *amanecer* en su conjugación personal. Cito primero del original en español para poner de relieve la turbulencia que semejante uso provoca en la traducción al inglés:

cada día es nacer, un nacimiento  
es cada amanecer y yo *amanezco*,  
*amanecemos* todos, *amanece*  
el sol cara de sol, Juan *amanece*,  
con su cara de Juan cara de todos,

puerto del ser, despiértame, *amanece*,  
déjame ver el rostro de este día,  
déjame ver el rostro de esta noche,  
todo se comunica y transfigura,  
arco de sangre, puente de latidos,  
llévame al otro lado de esta noche,  
adonde yo soy tú somos nosotros,  
al reino de pronombres enlazados.

Everyday is a birth, and every daybreak  
another birthplace and I *am the break of day,*  
*we all dawn on the day,* the sun dawns  
and daybreak is the face of the sun, John  
*is the break of day* with John's face, face of all

gate of our being, awaken me, *bring dawn,*  
grant that I see the face of the living day,  
grant that I see the face of this live night,  
everything speaks now, everything is transformed,  
O arch of blood, bridge of our pulse beating,  
carry me through to the far side of this night,  
the place where I am You, equals ourselves,  
kingdoms or persons and pronouns intertwined.<sup>17</sup>

Las palabras en cursiva, tanto en el original como en la traducción, comunican algo del registro semántico de *amanecer*. Sin embargo, a mí me parece que la mejor traducción de lo que Paz está intentando lograr con palabras y frases como “nacimiento,” “puerta del ser” y “todo se comunica y transfigura” se encuentra en un conciso pasaje del poema de Wright *Explications/Interpretations*:

We say each dawn is a bond  
of your own beginning,  
the ground established for our  
movement from dawn to dawn. ( 159)

(Decimos que cada alba es un lazo/ con el origen de cada uno,/ el lugar establecido para/ movernos de amanecer a amanecer.)

Para Paz y Wright *amanecer* es una figura cinética que expresa el proceso de juntar elementos de culturas diversas para tender un puente palpitante, un arco de sangres conjugadas, o lo que Wright denomina “un lazo/ con el origen de cada uno.” El amanecer es el momento de las transformaciones y transfiguraciones, el punto en que la dudosa luz del día abre la puerta del ser para convertirla en una entrada a lo humano. Todas estas figuras pertenecen a un conjunto tropológico que se erige alrededor de un mito sintético que Wright ha denominado “limbo negro.”

Hasta aquí me he ocupado de llenar el espacio entre “anohecimos enfermo” y “amanecemos bueno.” Pero también tenemos que tomar en consideración que la síntesis cultural “no significa necesariamente la plenitud sino un vacío en el cual los diversos elementos se encuentran y cancelan unos a otros para abrir la cuestión del ser.”<sup>18</sup> Esta aseveración es útil por cuanto nos permite sopesar las ramificaciones más amplias del tipo de espacios que Wright crea. La brecha en el texto, que a veces aparece como una fértil blancura (234), es el punto de partida para la indagación ontológica del portavoz poético en la obra de Wright, el punto donde se le hace necesario al yo o a la cultura definir (o redefinir) su modo de ser. Este intento de redefinición se hace necesario porque el choque entre las diferentes culturas que se encuentran en esa brecha trae por consecuencia un desarraigo. Como resultado de un proceso mediante el cual los antiguos valores y creencias de cada cultura implicada se desestabilizan y convierten en significantes flotantes de un nuevo sistema de reciprocidad, se hace ahora inevitable la creación de un nuevo orden en que esos significantes puedan acomodarse. Pero como el nuevo intercambio que se establece en realidad nunca termina, ese acomodo en un orden nuevo no es algo permanente sino un descanso o pausa temporal: la brecha debe permanecer abierta para intercambios futuros.

Las “cuentas” poéticas que Wright ensarta para formar un mapa son justamente esos lugares de intercambio cultural y desarraigo. Otra “cuenta”—quizás más compleja—que Wright le añade a este “rosario secular,” junto a la España medieval, es el Caribe hispánico, en este caso Cuba.

In Cuba,  
Black Melchior caresses the cobra.  
Dahomey dance Havana boa  
This Python, sacred serpent of Delphi,  
this Pythia, stretching the dark corners,  
dark herself, caught in darkness,  
sees the fat sin burned on the island.

Upon a Day of Kings,  
these women dressed in white  
group themselves and pirouette,  
and become my dawn,  
  my sun  
my earth,

my lamb,  
my buzzard,  
my butterfly  
I live this day through them,  
counting no clock time  
but the blood's time,  
the gentle rise and fall

Of a donu bord's wings.

I assert that I am twinned to your light within. (254)

(En Cuba,/ el negro Melchor acaricia la cobra./ Baile dahomeyano majá de La Habana / Este pitón, serpiente sagrada de Delfos, / Esta Pitía, estirando rincones oscuros,/ negra ella misma, cogida en la negrura,/ ve el pecado grueso quemarse en la isla. / En el Día de Reyes,/ estas mujeres, vestidas de blanco/ se juntan y hacen piruetas/ y se convierten en mi amanecer,/ mi sol, mi alba,/ mi tierra,/ mi cordero,/ mi aura,/ mi mariposa./ Vivo este día a través de ellas,/ sin contar tiempo del reloj/ sino el tiempo de la sangre,/ el suave subir y bajar/ de las alas de un pájaro donu. / Me declaro gemelo de tu luz interior.)

La invocación que Wright hace del Día de Reyes es crucial en este pasaje. De manera reveladora por sí misma, ya se establece aquí un vínculo con la cita anterior en la recurrencia conspicua del espacio textual: "Baile dahomeyano majá de La Habana." La importancia del Día de Reyes se encuentra en que, como Fernando Ortiz ha demostrado, era éste un ritual importante durante la esclavitud tanto en Cuba como en el Brasil.<sup>19</sup> En ese día, a los esclavos se les permitía expresar su deseo de ser libres y regresar simbólicamente a la madre patria. Cada "cabildo" ("nación" o región de origen en el Africa) elegía a un rey por un día y desfilaba, bailando, hacia la casa de los amos para pedir el aguinaldo pascual. El Día de Reyes se celebraba tradicionalmente en la Epifanía (el 6 de enero), era un ritual sincrético en que los tres reyes magos (entre ellos, por supuesto, el negro Melchor) representaban los diversos grupos que constituyen la cultura cubana. La concomitancia en la cita anterior de Wright de Dahomey, La Habana y Delfos sugiere un sincretismo semejante.

La celebración afrocubana y afrobrasileña del Día de Reyes es un ritual simbólico de la resistencia contra la esclavitud y representa los efectos perturbadores de la cultura africana en América Latina, pero también en todo el Nuevo Mundo. En

*Dimensions of History*, como en *El siglo de las luces* de Alejo Carpentier, la presencia de este ritual crea una deformación temporal: cuando las mujeres, “vestidas de blanco/ se juntan y hacen piruetas” la historia deja de medirse según el tiempo del reloj para tornarse en vez en el “tiempo de la sangre,” un remolino de fechas desasidas de toda cronología. Esta deformación de la historia provoca otro “amanecer,” un nuevo comienzo en el lugar de encuentro de dos culturas, la española y la africana.

Ejemplos de este tipo de ritual de desplazamiento y suplementación, que es una especie de modulación cultural, abundan en *Dimensions of History*. Los ejemplos que siguen son de la Parte 2, “Modulations: The Aesthetic Dimension” (Modulaciones: la estética de la dimensión), y más específicamente de la sección intitulada “Rhythms, Charts, and Changes” (Ritmos, mapas y cambios). Esta sección abre, apropiadamente, con una firma ritual bambara que anuncia el principio de una nueva creación. Este ideograma, que Wright también usa en *The Double Invention of Komo* (366-67), está compuesto de “the god’s immutable and uplifted knife” (el cuchillo permanente e inmutable del dios) y “the whirlwind’s hook” (el garfio del torbellino) cuya combinación anuncia un nuevo orden que surgirá después de la destrucción del mundo, del caos causado por el torbellino—las tropelías del “tropollino.”<sup>20</sup>

A diferencia de la primera parte de *Dimensions of History*, que está dividida en tres largas secciones, “Ritmos, mapas y cambios” está compuesta de una rápida sucesión de catorce poemas relativamente breves, cada uno de los cuales deriva su título (y cadencia) de una forma musical o poética específica. En algunos casos Wright usa el nombre de los instrumentos musicales específicos que se emplean en un baile o ceremonia en particular: “Teponaztli” es un tambor precolombino de madera; “Atabaqué” es un juego de tambores que se toca en el ritual afrobrasileño *candomblé*; “Bandola” es una guitarra pequeña que se usa en música folklórica caribeña; “Huehuetl” es un tambor mexicano vertical también relacionado al *huehuetlatolli*, un rito verbal azteca; “Pututu” es una trompeta de concha quechua; y “maracas,” no creo necesite definición. Lo fundamental es que todos estos instrumentos pertenecen a culturas del Nuevo Mundo; sus orígenes son, por su mayor parte, amerindios, afroamericanos, o latinoamericanos. Lo mismo puede decirse de “Joropo,” un baile folklórico venezolano; “Lundú,” un baile folklórico brasileño que forma parte de celebraciones que acompañan la recolección de cosechas; “Tamborito,” un baile panameño-africano; “Bambuco,” un baile popular de Colombia y Venezuela; “Vela,” una ceremonia cuasi religiosa dominicana; “Son,” una canción cubana escrita en versos de romance; y “Areíto,” una canto taíno coral que se cantaba en las fiestas del mismo nombre. Los “villancicos” son formas verbales españolas que se remontan a la Edad Media y que se siguen escribiendo

durante los siglos XVI y XVII, pero la alusión de Wright es específicamente a Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, que escribió algunos “villancicos” con una inflexión afro-criolla. No es necesario examinar en detalle cada uno de los poemas arriba mencionados para darse cuenta que “Ritmos, mapas y cambios” es una compleja mezcla de elementos recogidos de diferentes culturas presentes en el Nuevo Mundo para “hacer música como antes / pero más vasta,” según los versos de Tennyson que Du Bois cita en su *The Souls of Black Folk*.<sup>21</sup>

Hay, no obstante, un poema que es especialmente representativo de la amalgama cultural que se evoca en esta sección de *Dimensions of History*: la versión del “Son de la Ma’ Teodora” que ofrece Wright, que aparece como la tercera “afinación” de su “Bandola.”

Má lover of god  
Má loved by god  
Má of the sun  
Má of the river  
Má of the timber  
Má of the wood  
Má of the grief  
Má Teodora  
What source  
is in your circle?  
Why do you dance  
with the *palo codal*?  
What itch constrains  
your orisha limp?  
Who is the simp  
to arrange your fall?  
Má Má Teodora  
fifteen sinners  
guide you through the berries  
of your own exultation.  
Fifteen lines and a stick  
make a whip  
to remind you of the grave.  
Fifteen stones and a star



lift you to a cloud  
beyond my reach.  
Ma loved by god  
your ride your flesh so surely  
the gods within the flat drums  
keep a tap  
upon the earth. (264-65)

(Má amante de dios/ Má amada por dios/ Má del sol/ Má del río/ Má de la madera/ Má del bosque/ Má de la tristeza/ Má Teodora/ ¿Qué fuente hay/ en tu círculo?/ ¿Por qué bailas con el *palo codal*?/ ¿Qué picazón provoca/ tu cojera de orisha?/ ¿Quién será el tonto/ que prepare tu caída?/ Má Má Teodora/ quince pecadores/ te guían por las moras/ de tu júbilo./ Quince líneas y un palo/ son un látigo/ para recordarte de la tumba./ Quince piedras y un jarro/ te elevan a una nube que no alcanzo./ Má amada de dios/ cabalgas en carne tan segura/ que los dioses en los tambores chatos/ tamborilean/ sobre la tierra.)

El “Son” original, compuesto, tocado y bailado en Cuba por Teodora Ginés, una negra dominicana, durante la segunda mitad del siglo XVI, dice así:

—¿Dónde está la Ma’ Teodora?  
—Rajando la leña está.  
—¿Con su palo y su bandola?  
—Rajando la leña está.  
—¿Dónde está que no la veo?  
—Rajando la leña está.  
—Rajando la leña está.<sup>22</sup>

Entrelazando elementos de las culturas española, africana y taína en una estructura de responso que subraya el aspecto ritual de la función, el “Son de la Ma’ Teodora” es un poderoso pretexto para la creación del tapiz poético de Wright. Los comentarios de González Echevarría son especialmente pertinentes para comprender la rescritura del “Son de la Ma’ Teodora” que Wright lleva a cabo:

La formas de responso del “Son” y el ritual que evoca no son únicamente africanos sino taínos. El canto y baile de Teodora son un “areíto,” una fiesta

taína cuyo significado, sugestivamente, es “bailar recordando,” o “bailar para recordar.” Bailar es una manera de preservar el pasado—tradición, cultura, legado—vivo. Podemos suponer que Ma’ Teodora no es sólo madre sino vieja. Ella encarna la tradición. Cuando el “Son” pregunta “—¿Dónde está la Ma’ Teodora?” realmente indaga, “¿Dónde está la tradición?” La persecución simulada de la Ma’ Teodora es una búsqueda de la tradición, un conjuro para evitar su desaparición. Teodora es la memoria viva. El júbilo al final del “Son” es el embriagador redescubrimiento de la tradición, la inmersión en un ritmo primigenio, que marca y recupera el tiempo perdido.<sup>23</sup>

La Ma’ Teodora de Wright ciertamente lleva el ritmo y recupera el tiempo, no sólo tamborileando con su bastón africano, su palo, en la tierra mientras baila. Más pertinentemente, el ritmo creado por su tamborileo es una expresión de los pensamientos de “los dioses en los tambores chatos,” que, como Teodora misma, marcan el ritmo “sobre la tierra.” Ma Teodora salvaguarda el ritmo y la música de la tradición, el “lenguaje” de esos dioses en los tambores. Pero el ritmo del poema de Wright difiere del ritmo del “Son” original. Wright no sólo altera la estructura elemental de responso del “son/areíto” sino que le atribuye a la figura de la Ma Teodora una serie de características suplementarias cuya enumeración toma la forma de una letanía católica. Su “cojera de orisha” la relaciona con Eshu-Elegba, la deidad yoruba que custodia las encrucijadas (que es la versión afrocubana de San Lázaro, representado siempre con muletas), mientras que el epitafio “Má del río” la identifica con Ochún, la diosa afrocubana de las aguas tranquilas quien, a su vez, está asociada con la Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, la santa patrona de Cuba.<sup>24</sup> “Má de la madera” y “Má del bosque,” además de aludir a “Rajando la leña está,” también evoca la máscara de madera tallada que se usa en diversas ceremonias adivinatorias africanas. “Má de la tristeza,” además, destaca que la Ma Teodora de Wright, como la original, no es una “joven madre” que todavía ignora “the meaning/ of another death” (el significado/ de otra muerte) (237), sino alguien que conoce la desposesión, es decir, las lecciones de la esclavitud (“Quince líneas y un palo/son un látigo”) y el sentido del parentesco. Má Teodora es, claramente, la contrapartida femenina del sabio dogon Ogotemmêli.

Por último, pero no por ello menos importante, debemos tomar noticia del cambio de “palo” a “palo codal,” siendo éste, como el propio Wright explica, un palo que se cuelga del cuello a manera de castigo. Esta variación es de considerable interés porque evoca una figura famosa de la literatura latinoamericana: Juana García, que aparece en *El Carnero* (1638) de Juan Rodríguez Freyle. Juana García es el prototipo de

la bruja negra. Al final de su historia, que aparece en las antologías bajo el título “Un negocio con Juana García,” el Inquisidor Mayor de Santa Fe de Bogotá la castiga por sus transgresiones mágicas. La sentencian a estar de pie sobre una especie de cadalso con una vela encendida en una mano y un dogal al cuello.<sup>25</sup> La última imagen que tenemos de Juana García es reminiscente de la Má Teodora de Wright, cuyo “palo codal” significa la transformación irónica de un símbolo de sumisión en otro de libertad.<sup>26</sup> El nexa entre Má Teodora y Juana García le añade otra dimensión a la figura de esta bailarina: Teodora, como Juana, es “una negra un poco voladora,” un tipo de bruja, o, para ser más precisa, una que tiene el poder de curar y de “volar,” es decir, de alcanzar un “angle of ascent” (ángulo de elevación) en el sentido del poeta Robert Hayden. Como representante de la tradición, Teodora tiene la capacidad de curar las heridas del exilio al crear, en la forma de su “Son” (su propio *limbo* negro), la imagen vital de una nueva comunidad, la de los “Orphans of the earth” (Huérfanos de la tierra) (273), que se congrega en las encrucijadas. Las encrucijadas son el lugar simbólico de intercambio y transformación, cruces que marcan el interior del “círculo” de Má Teodora, la “fuente” de la literatura hispánica del Caribe.

My life  
is in the middle of this dance.  
My heart unfolds  
to accept this cross,  
the stone of our customary light. (281)

(Mi vida/ está en el centro de este baile. / Mi corazón se abre / para acoger esta  
cruz, / piedra de nuestra luz habitual.)

El “Son de la Ma’ Teodora” es otra fábula de fundación de la cultura y escritura del Nuevo Mundo, otra “cuenta” que se suma al “rosario” del poeta.

Pero el Nuevo Mundo es más que un mero escenario que enmarca el renovado encuentro entre Europa y Africa. Wright no considera la América precolombina como un ambiente desprovisto de civilización. Esto se hace ya evidente en su versión del “Son de la Ma’ Teodora.” Podría hasta llegar a decirse que la destrucción de las civilizaciones que prosperaban en América mucho antes de que los españoles llegaran a sus playas es un episodio de la historia universal de tanta importancia como la decadencia del Imperio Romano durante la primera mitad del siglo V. Mientras que semejante analogía es valiosa porque les devuelve a esas civilizaciones precolombinas

su lugar propio en el contexto de la historia cultural del Nuevo Mundo, no puede ser fundamentación válida para suponer que por lo tanto la historia del Nuevo Mundo pueda ser parcelada en períodos que correspondan en su secuencia histórica a la antigüedad europea, la Edad Media, el Renacimiento, y así sucesivamente, todas comprimidas en el relativamente breve intervalo de aproximadamente cinco centurias. Resulta claro que no es éste el caso. Además, tal concepto lineal de la historia soslayaría el factor más decisivo en la historia cultural del Nuevo Mundo, que la hace diferente de sus contrapartidas europeas: ese factor es la anomalía temporal que produce la presencia simultánea de los que generalmente se consideran períodos históricos distintos. Para convertir el fenómeno lineal que llamamos historia americana en historia del Nuevo Mundo hay que transformar el sistema diacrónico en sincrónico. Hay que reconocer que nos enfrentamos a un campo histórico en que la Edad Media española, el Renacimiento italiano están lado a lado de la Ilustración y la Modernidad, y en el que los estrépitos de la Revolución Industrial se mezclan libremente con canciones quechuas y nahuatl, así como con los compelentes ritmos de tambores yoruba y ashanti—ecos de culturas más antiguas que Grecia y Roma.

Si por historia del Nuevo Mundo se entiende no simplemente una sucesión cronológica sino en vez un espacio en el que todos los períodos históricos anteriores coexisten, se hace evidente que una mitología del Nuevo Mundo, en el sentido que le da Wright, puede aprovechar una inexhaustible e increíblemente diversa y rica fuente en la que los mitos europeos desempeñan un papel relativamente minúsculo.<sup>27</sup> Para Wright lo más importante es cómo los diferentes mitos se relacionan unos con otros en el contexto de la historia del Nuevo Mundo y cómo ese proceso de interacción y transformación genera genuinas fábulas de fundación. La siguiente cita extensa de *Dimensions of History*, que nos retrotrae a la figura de la ciudad como escenario cultural, es un excelente ejemplo de ello.

So Nuño de Guzmán, governor of New Spain,  
employs Tejo the trader,  
trader of gold and silver.  
Bearer of the tales of the Seven Cities.  
Weary at Culiacán,  
he finds four sailors,  
lost in the search for the flowered  
end of things.  
Now, the friar takes the slave

into the valley, and sends him on above.  
Send me a cross as big as my hands,  
if the land is good.  
If it challenges our new mother,  
send a cross larger than that.  
A day two days four,  
and a cross "as tall as a man"  
mysteries of Seven Great Cities  
under the Black mans's eyes.

Following God's candles  
further than the friar will go,  
your light breaks down as Hawikúh,  
Estevan Stephen  
carrying your own stone  
into the valley,  
victim again of your services,  
you lie at the gate of the Seven Cities.  
Who will trim your hair and pare your nails  
to send your sunsum home?  
What sister will shave her hair for your soul?  
The friar never approaches the gate.  
He stands elevated long enough  
to set a cross for Spain.

At this point,  
each day, the young priest appears.  
He wears the crescent moon embossed  
with sun, moon and stars.  
He would set the bowl in the friar's tree.  
Your 'Nyame dua, father.  
Your shrine not anywhere but here.  
Friar and the crowned return.  
The plumed and mailed blessed ones  
search for the gate again.  
This is the gate of gold

Gao Guinea Hawikúh.  
But there is no gold,  
only the whisper of the wind  
fluting the black man's liberated bones.

Into this sound,  
tracking highways, you come.  
Cold morning's return out of the desert.  
Cold metal search in the Golden State  
to return, enchanted again at the gate.  
Not gold. Not the cities' magnificence.  
What others left at the gate  
you found within, extended,

“A gateway to the beautiful.” (250-52)

(Así que Nuño de Guzmán, gobernador de la Nueva España, / emplea a Tejo,  
el comerciante, / traficante de oro y plata, / portador de los relatos de las Siete  
Ciudades. / Cansado, en Culiacán, se encuentra con cuatro marineros, /  
perdidos en la búsqueda del costado / florido de las cosas. / El fraile lleva  
ahora al esclavo / al valle y le ordena subir. / Mándame una cruz tan grande  
como mis manos, / si la tierra es buena. / Si desafían a nuestra nueva madre, /  
envíame una cruz todavía más grande. / Un día dos días cuatro, / y una  
cruz “tan alta como un hombre” / misterios de las Siete Grandes Ciudades /  
bajo los ojos del negro. // Siguiendo los cirios de Dios / más lejos de lo que iría  
el fraile / tu luz se rompe en Hawikúh. / Estevan Stephen / cargando tu  
propia piedra / hasta el valle, / víctima otra vez de tus servicios, / te acuestas  
frente a las puertas de las Siete Ciudades. / ¿Quién te va a recortar el pelo y las  
uñas / para enviar tu sunsum a casa? / ¿Qué hermana se va a pelar al rape por  
tu alma? / El fraile nunca se acerca a las puertas. / Se para en lo alto el tiempo  
necesario / para clavar una cruz por España. // En ese momento, / todos los  
días, aparece el joven cura. / Lleva una luna creciente / con un sol, la luna y las  
estrellas grabados. / Pondría el tazón en el árbol del fraile. / Su 'Nyame dua,  
padre. / Su altar no en cualquier parte sino aquí. // El fraile y el retorno  
coronado, / los benedictos emplumados y con malla / buscan otra vez las  
puertas. / Estas son las puertas del oro / Gao Guinea Hawikúh. / Pero no  
hay oro, / sólo el susurro del viento / que estría los huesos liberados del

negro.// Hacia ese sonido,/ trazando carreteras tú vienes./ Retorno del desierto en mañana fría./ Búsqueda del metal frío en el Estado de Oro/ para volver, encantado otra vez a las puertas./ No el oro. Ni el esplendor de las ciudades./ Lo que otros abandonaron en las puertas/ lo encuentras dentro,/ “puertas que conducen a lo bello.”)

Wright ofrece en este pasaje su propia versión poética de la historia de Hawikúh, un pueblo zuñi de considerable tamaño cuyas ruinas se encuentran en la región norte del actual Nuevo México. Dado que el propio Wright nació en Albuquerque, no es sorprendente que la historia de Nuevo México tenga un significado especial para él. Pero más allá de cualquier memoria personal que pueda resonar en los versos antes citados, debe notarse que Hawikúh es un importante, aunque ignorado monumento de la historia temprana de América. Considerado como una de las llamadas “Siete Ciudades de Cíbola” y reputada como rica en oro y plata, Hawikúh fue el objetivo primordial de una serie de expediciones organizadas por varios exploradores españoles durante la primera mitad del siglo XVI. Nuño de Guzmán, gobernador de la Nueva España de 1528 a 1536, fue el primero en lanzarse a un viaje exploratorio inspirado por los relatos que le hiciera su esclavo indio Tejo. El viaje, que duró dos años, fue un fracaso porque a los españoles les resultó imposible localizar las misteriosas Siete Ciudades. Pero sí resultó en la fundación de Culiacán, la presente capital del estado mexicano de Sinaloa, que paso a servir de base de operaciones para incursiones esclavistas en esa área.<sup>28</sup>

Para Wright la fábula de las Siete Ciudades de Cíbola representa el sincretismo en el punto de convergencia de dos culturas: la española, representada por Nuño de Guzmán, y la india, representada por Tejo. La configuración de ideas generada como resultado del contacto e interacción verbal entre Guzmán y Tejo, la fábula de las Siete Ciudades de Cíbola es paradigmática del tipo de intercambio y colaboración que Wright le atribuye a la ciudad. Cualquiera que haya sido su existencia real, Hawikúh, en su fabulosa manifestación se proyecta aquí como la morada, en el sentido que le da Américo Castro a la palabra, de la cultura del Nuevo Mundo. La noción de sincretismo se refuerza mediante la alusión a Cabeza de Vaca, cuya relación de viaje de 1542 es, al lado del relato de Pedro Serrano que el Inca Garcilaso incluye en sus *Comentarios reales*, tal vez el testimonio más notable de tipos de desarraigo y despojo de toda marca de civilización que algunos de los conquistadores experimentaron en el Nuevo Mundo. La relación de Cabeza de Vaca es notable porque, en una época en que los españoles estaban enfrascados en la destrucción masiva de culturas indígenas a todo lo largo del

Nuevo Mundo, ofrece la posibilidad de un intercambio cultural *mutuo* entre europeos e indios, así como entre indios y negros, como lo demuestra la presencia de Estevan.<sup>29</sup> Si damos crédito al informe de Alarcón, Estevan mostraba signos de su convivencia con los indios con todas esas plumas y sonajas que adornaban su cuerpo y que probablemente lo identificaban además como curandero.

No sorprende que Wright considere el relato de la muerte de Estevan en Hawikúh como la dimensión más significativa de la leyenda de las Siete Ciudades de Cíbola. Por supuesto, el mero hecho de que un negro descubriese la primera “ciudad” en América del Norte es más que suficiente para conferirle a su historia el rango de fábula de fundación de igual importancia que la de la participación de Benjamín Banneker en la fundación de la capital de los Estados Unidos. Pero hay más en “los misterios de las Siete Grandes Ciudades / bajo los ojos del negro.” En cierto modo estamos acompañando otra vez al portavoz poético de Wright en otro paseo por un cementerio: la cruz que Estevan le envía al fraile, una cruz “tan alta como un hombre,” es la que va a marcar su propia tumba, es decir, el lugar de su muerte. Reaparece en la segunda estrofa como la cruz que Fray Marcos clava en nombre de España, sólo para ser transfigurada en “el árbol del fraile” y finalmente en “Nyame dua” (el árbol de Dios), el altar “triádico” de Akan.<sup>30</sup> Pero lo más persuasivo de esta transfiguración es que el “joven cura,” quien se dice aparece en el mismo momento todos los días, lleva la insignia de Zot, el dios egipcio del conocimiento, la escritura y la medicina: “Lleva una luna creciente / con un sol, la luna y las estrellas grabados.” Esta curiosa mezcla de figuras en la tercera estrofa del poema antes citado es la clave de la fábula de fundación que Wright elabora.

La aparición de Zot, el maestro de los libros y el “escribano de la verdad,” en el lugar exacto en que el fraile, según su propia narrativa ficcionalizada, erige una cruz para tomar posesión de la tierra consagrada por la sangre de Estevan, anuncia abiertamente la transición de la historia al mito. La figura de Zot abre otra dimensión interpretativa, que se hace aún más aparente una vez que miramos con más detenimiento a las características que se le atribuyen a ese dios en la mitología egipcia. Zot es una figura del proceso de suplementación que Wright pone en movimiento en este pasaje. Encargado de amortajar a los muertos, Zot es el que le administra los ritos funerales de Estevan: “¿Quién te va a recortar el pelo y las uñas / para enviar tu sunsum a casa?” Pero Zot también ocupa el lugar de Estevan e inicia un fascinante juego de desdoblamientos y substituciones, reencarnando como Estevan de diversas maneras y en diferentes figuras, evitando que su muerte traiga como resultado la clausura. “Estevan/Stephen.” No es casualidad que una vez más nos encontremos esta brecha en el texto, que marca en este caso la presencia (o mejor, la ausencia) de Zot, quien



ocupa el lugar de la sustitución y la suplementariedad. Es en ese sitio que Estevan, el descubridor de Hawikúh, reencarna como el Esteban de *El siglo de las luces*, la novela de Carpentier, el Esteban Montejo de *Biografía de un cimarrón*, de Miguel Barnet, y por último, pero no menos significativo, el Stephen de *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, de James Joyce. El que Joyce también haya invocado a Zot en relación a la figura de Stephen Daedalus, un personaje al que debe mucho el Esteban de Carpentier, refuerza aún más el nexo entre estas figuras: “Una sensación de miedo de lo desconocido se alojó en el corazón de su cansancio, miedo de símbolos y portentos, del hombre-halcón, cuyo nombre llevaba, alzando el vuelo con alas de mimbre para escapar de su prisión, de Zot, dios de los escritores, escribiendo con un junco sobre una tabla y ostentando sobre su espigada cabeza de ibis el cuerno de la luna.”<sup>31</sup> El que Zot sea también el inventor y patrón de los números nos advierte de la presencia de otro ser mitológico que también es el encargado del lenguaje: Nummo (o Nommo), el séptimo ancestro de Dogon quien, como Zot, es el maestro de la Palabra.<sup>32</sup> En la mitología dogon se representa a Nommo con el número siete, que aparece, en el contexto de *Dimensions of History*, no sólo en las *Siete* ciudades, sino también en la línea que representa el viaje de Estevan a Hawikúh: “Un día    dos días    cuatro.” El número de días mencionado (cuatro) más el número de frases que constituyen estas línea (tres) dan siete, mientras que los espacios en blanco del texto siguen insinuando la presencia ambigua de Zot, el ausente, que actúan como catalista en este juego numerológico.

He mencionado antes que tejer es una de las figuras preferidas de la escritura en la obra de Wright, una de especial significación en su “Second Conversations with Ogotemmêli,” recogido en *Soothsayers and Omens*. El estrecho parecido metafórico entre tejido y texto es, desde luego, obvio, pero el nexo entre tejer y escribir va mucho más allá y nos retorna a lo que he llamado el “lenguaje” de la ciudad como paisaje cultural. Porque, como Ogotemmêli también observa:

El antiguo método de cultivo...es como tejer... Si un hombre despeja un terreno y marca un solar cuadrado y erige una vivienda sobre él, su trabajo es como el de hacer un tejido. Más aún, tejer es una forma de hablar, que se le imparte al tejido con el movimiento de ir y venir de la lanzadera sobre la urdimbre; de la misma forma el ir y venir del campesino sobre su terreno le imparte la Palabra de los ancestros...a la tierra sobre la que trabaja, y así purifica la tierra y extiende el área de cultivo alrededor de lugares habitados. Pero si cultivar es una forma de tejer, es igualmente cierto que tejer es una forma de cultivo... La trama que resulta es símbolo del campo cultivado.<sup>33</sup>

Romper la tierra, entonces, es evidentemente una forma de escribir. Es un proceso mediante el cual se transforma un paisaje natural en otro cultivado y cultural, la ciudad, y por lo tanto constituye un acto de fundación. Con referencia a la cita de *Dimensions of History*, que sigue siendo el foco de mi comentario, es importante notar que el acto de asesinar a Estevan representa, recrea ese proceso fundamental de cultivo. La sangre de Estevan fortalece el portón de las Siete Ciudades, pero, aún más importante, sirve de mediación entre la historia de Hawikúh, el mito de las Siete Ciudades, y el poeta que explora las ruinas de ambas. Este rastro de sangre, pudiera decirse, hace inteligible las ruinas; a causa de él, las ruinas de Hawikúh están “encantadas” por “el susurro del viento / que estría los huesos liberados del negro.” La figura que Wright ofrece del viento del desierto “estriando” los huesos de Estevan es como una sinfonía metafórica, o transferencia de espíritu, que está también vinculada a la flauta de hueso de los caribes de una manera que las siguientes palabras de Wilson Harris dilucidan: “En el Hueso, o flauta / de los caribes / está implícita la pared hecha de esqueletos de una edad cruel—la fisuras o rajaduras en la mentalidad o armazón ideológica de la conquista. Esa armazón no marca ya una propiedad absoluta del globo terrestre, sino que se convierte en un *órgano de memoria* a través del cual sonar la invocación de perspectivas comunitarias alertadas contra un nuevo recubrimiento de la mentalidad o armazón del imperio como monolito recurrente e insensible.”<sup>34</sup> Como evento histórico-mitológico, la muerte de Estevan produce fisuras o rajaduras en el texto del poema, aperturas que hacen posible para ambos el poeta y el lector, penetrar la superficie de ese lecho de Procrusto que es la Cultura Americana y explorar las misteriosas profundidades de los entrecruzamientos culturales del Nuevo Mundo.

Wright no busca oro, como hicieron los conquistadores, sino “a gateway to the beautiful,” una Vía a la Belleza. Esa vía o umbral, que se extiende por las rajaduras entre “Gao Guinea Hawikúh” lo lleva a él y a nosotros a un espacio de transformaciones donde el esclavo negro Estevan está sentado, liberado, en compañía no sólo de sus más inmediatos familiares literarios, los demás Estebanes, sino también con Zot y el séptimo Nommo, en el altar del dios akan ‘Nyame (o Onyame). Según Danquah, Onyame encarna “el entendimiento y también... la realidad más allá... él es la unificación de todos los sentimientos de ser, y en esa unidad hay una unión, una armonía y fruición de lo artístico, una placidez placentera y elocuente, una vía a la belleza.”<sup>35</sup> A medida que las grietas textuales se van convirtiendo en esa vía, la fábula poética de las Siete Ciudades que Wright urde se contrae para convertirse en un épico (y epifánico) momento que se hace eco resonante de un pasaje de *Souls of Black Folk* en que Du Bois escribe:

Me siento al lado de Shakespeare y él no hace la más mínima mueca. Cruzo la línea de color del brazo de Balzac y Dumas, hacia donde hombres y mujeres sonrientes se deslizan por salones dorados. De las cavernas de la noche, que cuelgan entre la tierra de fornidos brazos y la tracería de las estrellas, convoco a Aristóteles y a Aurelio y a cualquier alma que se me antoje, y todas acuden solícitas y sin rastro de desdén o condescendencia. Desposado así con la verdad, más allá del velo. ¿Es esa la vida que nos regateas, caballeresca América?... Tienes tanto temor de que oteando desde ese eminente monte Pisgah ...¿podamos divisar la Tierra Prometida?<sup>36</sup>

La “Tierra Prometida” del poeta de Wright, esa morada más alta que el velo, son las Siete Ciudades, un lugar situado simultáneamente dentro y fuera de la historia, un lugar que es a la vez hecho histórico y mito. Hawikúh-Cíbola es como el interior del círculo de la Ma’ Teodora: un punto en la encrucijada donde las realidades históricas se transforman y extienden. Es un lugar “encantado” que ha sido consagrado por la sangre de Estevan, de la misma manera que las murallas de Roma lo fueron con la de Remo. El paralelo entre esas dos muertes se encuentra en su significado ritual. La sangre de Estevan, como la de Remo, nutre la árida tierra del pasado; le añade otra dimensión: el mito. En este sentido, la muerte del negro puede verse como otra forma de cultivo. Mientras que la vida de Estevan puede verse como un proceso mediante el cual el mito se hace realidad histórica (localizar las Siete Ciudades como las Siete Ciudades de Cíbola), su muerte invierte el proceso, trayendo como consecuencia la transformación de esa realidad histórica en fábula de fundación. Este mito sintético es a la vez el otro y el mismo mito, o mitos originales, cuyo lugar ocupa. Su función no es estrictamente reemplazar esos mitos sino desplazarlos, y de esa manera abrir un espacio para sí.

Llevar a cabo tal desplazamiento es el propósito último de la muerte de Estevan, y es precisamente por eso que Wright lo asocia a Zot. A causa de este vínculo con el dios, la muerte de Estevan misma se convierte en figura de la escritura, de esa ambigua adquisición del alfabetismo que subvierte la cronología histórica e inaugura un nuevo orden hecho de nuevas alianzas históricas y mitológicas. Estevan, como el iniciado de Wright, es el “sangrado/negro, en el espacio/entre líneas” (*DI*, p. 33) de las crónicas oficiales de la historia de Nuevo México, las relaciones redactadas por Nuño de Guzmán, Cabeza de Vaca, Fray Marcos y muchos otros. Esos espacios, representan, como se ha visto, el desarraizar al igual que la plenitud, son las moradas textuales de intercambio y transformación. Localizan el juego de diferencias en la vanguardia de la cultura del Nuevo Mundo.

*Dimensions of History* demuestra, con la mayor claridad posible, que la visión que Wright tiene de la literatura del Nuevo Mundo es la de la “accumulation/ of all that we have suffered and won” (acumulación/ de todo lo que hemos sufrido y ganado) (235). Ganancias y pérdidas también figuran en la articulación de este nuevo espacio cultural, abierto por el exilio como una especie de desplazamiento geográfico, histórico y mitológico. Como el resultado inevitable de semejante acto de violento desplazamiento es, como hemos visto, una desraizar o despejar, es comprensible que este espacio nuevo se viera con frecuencia como una tierra de nadie, un desierto o tierra baldía, una peligrosa región inexplorada. Es ese limbo plagado de incertidumbres que Wright se propone *cultivar*: “all these powers lying dead,/ with no one to transform them” (todos esos poderes muertos/ sin nadie que los transforme) (255). Su método de cultivo es ensartar los fragmentos de muchos mitos dispersos por la historia para crear un nuevo tapiz, un mapa para cartografiar la tradición cultural y literaria del exilio del Nuevo Mundo. Esta construcción dinámica es un *campo* mitológico hecho de racimos de figuras que convergen y emanan de una figura maestra: la ciudad. La ciudad de Wright como paisaje cultural es “blood given bodily form” (sangre en forma de cuerpo) (236), la tradición encarnada, cuya arquitectura es también una *architextura*: un arcoiris (como en Harris) o un puente palpitante (como en Paz) que se extiende sobre las divisiones ideológicas que separan las llamadas mayorías de la minorías culturales y a un grupo étnico de otro.

Ese arco o puente como figura de lo compartido culmina al final de *Dimensions of History* con la llegada del poeta a la antigua ciudad maya de Labná.

I return now to my city at Labná.  
It has been a long march.  
I am half-naked.  
I retain no more than a band  
about my head, and a band about my waist,  
my sandals on my feet,  
my homespun mantle and a pouch  
for the gods' bones.  
But I am victorious.  
I march from the humble  
to the sacred side of the city.  
I enter where I return.  
I return again to the land of the star.  
There is peace in this elevation.

You come, if not to God,  
near to yourself.  
It is a star land, a golden land,  
our dark and true light,  
the image of our life among ourselves. (312)

(Y regreso ahora a mi ciudad en Labná. / Ha sido una larga marcha. / Estoy medio desnudo. / No me queda sino una cinta / en la cabeza, y una correa en el cintura, / las sandalias en los pies, / mi manto casero y una bolsa / para los huesos del dios. / Pero vuelvo victorioso. / Marcho de la parte humilde / de la ciudad a la sagrada. / Entro por donde retorno. / Regreso otra vez a la tierra de la estrella. / Hay paz en estas alturas. / Llegas, si no a Dios, / por lo menos a ti mismo. / Es una tierra estrellada, una tierra dorada, / nuestra oscura y verdadera luz, / la imagen de la vida entre nosotros.)

A diferencia de Tenochtitlán, Cuzco, Macchu Picchu, Cartagena y Bogotá, Labná no está fortificada—está desprovista de murallas. Curiosamente tiene, sin embargo, una puerta en forma de arco de triunfo que antes conectaba las dos partes de la ciudad. La Gran Entrada de Labná sugiere, como una sinécdoque, la presencia de una muralla que junta en vez de dividir, y es esa puerta la que Wright ofrece como la “imagen de la vida entre nosotros.” Guarnecida otra vez como entrada a la belleza, este arco de triunfo es el postrer “[emblem] of the ecstatic connection” (emblema del nexo extático) (256). Celebrando la aproximación sintética de Wright a la escritura del Nuevo Mundo, este emblema encarna un profundo diálogo poético en la encrucijada de varias culturas occidentales y no occidentales, un diálogo que incluye al Williams de *In the American Grain* y el Guillén de *El diario que a diario*. La voz poética de Wright habla, paradójica pero eficazmente, “without song” (sin canción), y al hacerlo, propicia “sea-changes” (transformaciones oceánicas) que “omiten las aguas.”

Traducción de Roberto González Echevarría

## NOTAS

1. El presente ensayo es un fragmento del capítulo dos de mi libro *Against the American Grain: Myth and History in William Carlos Williams, Jay Wright, and Nicolás Guillén* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 49-130.

2. Wilson Harris, *Explorations: A Selection of Talks and Articles, 1966-1981*, ed. Hena Maes-Jelinek (Mundelstrup, Dinamarca: Dangaroo Press, 1981), p. 5.
3. Charles Rowell, "The Unravelling of the Egg; An Interview with Jay Wright," *Jay Wright: A Special Issue, Callaloo* 19, 6 (otoño 1983), pp. 6-7.
4. El término es de Michael S. Harper. Ver su "High Modes: Vision as Ritual: Confirmation," en *Images of Kin; New and Selected Poems* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), pp. 177-78.
5. Erich Auerbach, *Gesammelte Aufsätze sur Romanischen Philologie* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1967), p. 223.
6. Auerbach, "Philologie der Weltliteratur," *Ibid*, p. 310.
7. Jay Wright, "Afterword," *The Double Invention of Komo* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980), p. 114.
8. Ver Jay Wright, "Desire's Design, Vision's Resonance: Black Poetry's Ritual and Historical Voice," *Callaloo* 30 (invierno 1987).
9. Harris, "The Native Phenomenon," en *Explorations*, pp. 52-53.
10. Williams, "The Poem as a Field of Action," en *Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams* (Nueva York: New Directions, 1969), p. 285.
11. Ver Robert B. Stepto, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1979).
12. Jay Wright, *Transfigurations: Collected Poems* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), p. 243. Las referencias en el texto remiten a esta nueva edición.
13. Véase Frederick Turner, *Beyond Geography: The Western Spirit against the Wilderness* (Nueva York: Viking Press, 1980).
14. Nicolás Guillén, *Obra poética, 1920-1970*, ed. Angel Augier (La Habana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1974), p. 395.
15. Ver Lydia Cabrera, *El monte: Igbo finda ewe orisha, vititi nfinda: notas sobre las religiones, la magia, las supersticiones y el folklore de los negros criollos y del pueblo de Cuba* (La Habana: Ediciones C.R., 1964; nueva edición Miami: Colección del Chichereku, 1971).
16. Américo Castro, *España en su historia. Cristianos, moros y judíos* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1948), p. 219.
17. Octavio Paz, *Piedra de sol* (México: Tezlongte, 1957), pp. 39-40. *Sun Stone*, tr. Muriel Rukeyser (Nueva York: World Poet Series, New Directions, sin fecha), p. 45. Todos los subrayados son míos.
18. Roberto González Echevarría, "Literature of the Hispanic Caribbean," *Latin American Literary Review* 8 (primavera 1980), p. 10.
19. Fernando Ortiz, *La antigua fiesta afrocubana de "Día de Reyes"* (La Habana: Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores Departamento de Asuntos Culturales, División de Publicaciones, 1960. La primera edición es de 1925).

20. Ver Germaine Dieterlen y Yousouf Tata Cissé, *Les fondements de la société d'initiation du Komô* (París: Mouton, 1972), p. 91.
21. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; Nueva York: New American Library, 1969), p. 209.
22. Citado por González Echevarría en "Literature of the Hispanic Caribbean," p. 7.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
24. Ver José J. Arrom, "La Virgen del Cobre: historia, leyenda y símbolo sincrético," *Certidumbre de América: estudios de letras, Folklore y cultura* (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1971), pp. 184-214; Lydia Cabrera, *Yemayá y Ochún* (Madrid: Colección del Chichereku en el Exilio, 1974); y María Elena Díaz, *The Virgin, the King and the Royal Slaves of El Cobre: Negotiating Freedom in Colonial Cuba, 1670-1780* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
25. Juan Rodríguez Freyle, *El carnero* (1638; Bogotá: Editorial Bedout, 1976), p. 143.
26. Ver mi ensayo, "The Logic of Wings: Gabriel García Márquez and Afro-American Literature," *Latin American Literary Review* 13 (enero-junio 1985), 137-38.
27. Véase el concepto de barroco y su relación con la falta de estilo de la realidad latinoamericana propuesta por Alejo Carpentier en su "De lo real maravilloso americano," en *Tientos y diferencias* (Montevideo: ARCA, 1967), pp. 102-20.
28. Ver Frederick Webb Hodge, *History of Hawikúh, New Mexico, One of the so-called Cities of Cibola* (Los Angeles: Southwest Museum, 1937), pp. 3-4.
29. El retrato que da Tsvetan Todorov de Cabeza de Vaca es distinto. Es sorprendente que ignore a Estevan en su *La conquête de l'Amérique* (1982).
30. J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion* (London: Frank Cass, 1968), p. 53.
31. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: Text, Criticism, and Notes*, ed. Chester G. Anderson (Nueva York: Viking Press, 1974), p. 225. La primera edición es de 1916. La traducción es mía (RGE).
32. Ver, además, Janheiz Jahn, "Nommo: The Magic Power of the Word," en *Muntu: An Outline of New African Culture*, trad. Marjorie Greene (Nueva York: Grove Press, 1961), 121-55. La primera edición es de 1958.
33. Marcel Griaule, *Conversations with Ogotemmêli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas*. Tr. Germaine Dieterlen. (Nueva York: Oxford University Press, 1975. La primera edición es de 1948.
34. Harris, *Explorations*, p. 53. El énfasis es mío. Para más detalles sobre el ritual caribe, ver, también de Harris, *The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), pp. 24-26.
35. Danquah, *Akan Doctrine of God*, p. 131.
36. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, p. 139. ☒

CARLOS AGUILERA  
TWO POEMS

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TYPOLOGIES ∞

A grosso modo: This text was worked from out of the Encyclopedia: it was worked from out of that zone wherein the Encyclopedia is defined as a conceptual-clinic-of-certain-stories. Its sense (or, one of its meanings) should be the following: to show that which could not otherwise be shown. Or, on the other hand: to show that which otherwise could only be shown. Beyond this, there is no other *logos*. Its reading should be carried out with innocence and a certain “praxis-of-truth,” as in the way children read (and: cut out) their heroes from a storybook.

C.A.A.



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I

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(Black Rat)

Rodent. Average size: from 18cm in length with another 18cm of tail.

coloration: from yellow with a wh

habits with human beings. Behavior: nocturnal. Prefers the high and dry sections of houses. Its diet is vegetable-based and, occasionally, carnivorous. Originally from Central Asia. Reproduction: 10 offspring per year.

Weight: 130 g. Head and body alike to those of the black mouse, but much larger, with the tail longer than the body. Highly variable nearly black to dull white underbelly. Co

**Common name:** Black Rat or House Rat;  
**Sci. name:** *Rattus Rattus*; **Fam.:** Muridae.

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## II

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### (Water Vole)

Rodent. Divided into two species : *A. Sapidus*, the larger, reaching 20cm in length, a weight of 220g , and *A. Terrestris*, reaching 17cm in length and a weight of 90g. Of bulky body with a long tail: half the length of the body and cylindrical , round head, small ears. Coloration: dull dark coat with a white underbelly. Behavior : diurnal and nocturnal. Does not hibernate but does store food. Diet: largely vegetable

(leaves, roots, and bulbs) and occasionally carnivorous. Builds its nest close to water with at least one submerged entrance, or in fields. Mating in spring and summer with a reproduction of 2 to 8 offspring per year.

**Common name(s):** Water Vole or Iberian Water Vole; **Sci. name(s):** *Arvicola Sapidus* and *Arvicola Terrestris*; **Fam.** Microtinae.

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### III

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#### (Brown Rat)

Rodent. Large  
r and bulkier t  
han the Black R  
at, reaching 23

cm in length wi  
th a little less th  
an this in tail an  
d some 350 g

in weight. Hea  
d not so long, s  
mall ears, tail s  
hort and thick.

Coloration: in g  
eneral is grey wi  
th a lighter under  
belly. Cohabits

with man, prefer  
ring basements

and sewers an  
d is highly aqua  
tic, can live in the  
wild, spreading

to rivers via se  
wage pipes. Beha  
viour nocturnal.  
Nests in corners a

nd crevices or next  
to water. Does no  
t hibernate or sto  
re food. Diet: var

ied. Reproduction:  
19 offspring p  
er year. Original  
ly from the step

pes of Central As  
ia. Is aggressive.

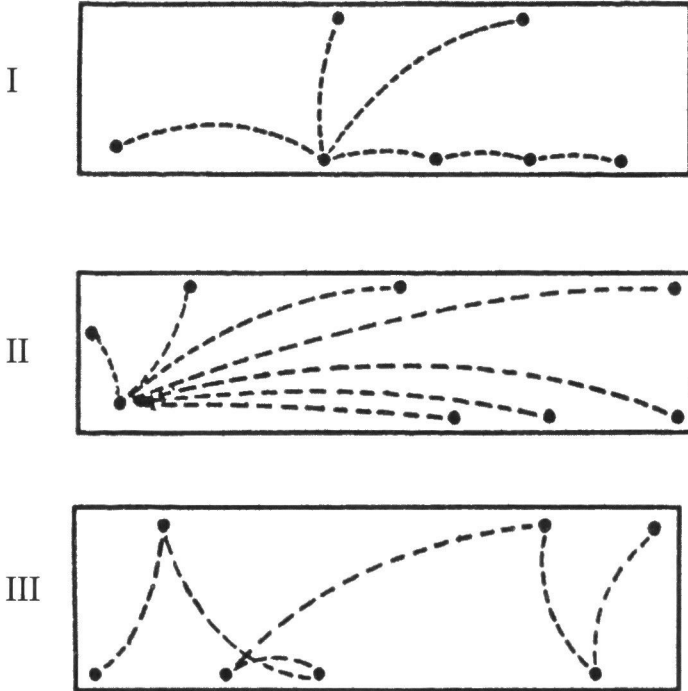
<p><b>Common name:</b> Brown Rat or Norway Rat; <b>Sci. name:</b> <i>Rattus Norvegicus</i>; <b>Fam.:</b> Muridae.</p>
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IV

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(Diagrams concerning the movements of rats)



These diagrams are no more than the (partial) iconization of the rhizomic movements a single rat can make at a given moment. These diagrams are interchangeable.

MAO ∞

And anyway today he's famous for his shrunken, vertically metaphysical  
mind

and not for that *lyrik*proletarian argument between a *yellowbelly*  
sparrow  
that falls and a *yellowbelly*  
sparrow  
that flies

or parentheses

between a *yellowbelly* sparrow that falls and a *yellowbelly* sparrow  
that *doesnotfly*

as Mao the economist defined smilingly

and as he said: "There, kill them..."

pointing to a light and compact space like that *notunique*  
*yellowbelly*  
sparrow

become now that "disgusting *yellowbelly* sparrow" or  
that "hardly  
ecological *yellowbelly*  
sparrow"

radical enemy of / and radical enemy to the point—

of destroying the countryside: "the bureaucratic economy of rice"

and demolishing the countryside: "the bureaucratic economy of ideology"  
with its tiny feet one-2-three  
(brokebrokebarroke)  
of all *maointention*

as was historically pointed out (or corrected) by komrade Mao  
in his *n*th attempt to make the people think:

"that stupid mass  
structured  
under the fluffy concept  
of The People"

which will never understand the *maodemokratik* in his movement  
against the sparrow  
which mutates into  
*yellowbelly*

nor the *maodemokratik* in his (nearly totalitarian) attempt to

not think about that  
*yellowbelly*  
sparrow

which establishes no differences between the surplus value of chaff and  
the surplus value of rice  
and by that count establishes no difference between a “tradition  
of chaff” and a  
“tradition of  
rice”

just as Mao clarified with a blow to the table and saying:

正名

or what is the same thing: 1000 sparrows dead: 2 hectares  
of rice/ 1500 sparrows  
dead: 3 hectares of  
rice/ 2600 sparrows  
dead: 5 hectares of  
rice

or I repeat *ch'ing ming*

where the concept of *violence* is annulled before the concept of *sense*  
(the time of the Chinese  
pharmacy cabinet)

and where the concept of violence should no longer be thought but rather  
from the point of what's  
“real” in the concept  
*oneonlysense* (as was  
clarified in a very timely  
way by president Mao and  
as he said in such a timely  
way: “if a worker  
marches with *extensity*  
eliminate him/ if a  
worker marches with  
*intensity*: sweaty  
visages with 1 boil  
of sense”)

highlighting with a metaphor the *nonfissure* which should exist  
between *maodemokratik*  
and sense

and highlighting with the same metaphor the fissure that exists  
between tradition  
and *nonsense*: generator  
of violence and  
*aorder* / generator of  
*nonhistory* and “little  
literary salons filled with  
*nonsensical writers*”

as was noted by personal scribes of Mao the little father  
on large  
white sheets

and as the scribe Qi noted later in the final  
version of his *Life and  
Times of President  
Mao* (3 vol.) where  
he explains what Mao  
the philosopher called  
“the overcoming of  
*feudohistory* and  
how / how / how (I insist)  
they had gone from a  
*feudohistory* (and a  
*microhistory*) to an  
*ideohistory* and to an  
*ecohistory* and even  
from an “unattentive  
observation of  
history” to a “small  
manipulation of history”  
(Peking / Peking: you  
must return to Peking...)

as the scribe Qi rewrote in that *corpus intellectualis*  
of komrade  
Mao

and as the (definitively) *civilservant* Mao was forced to correct  
by taking a knife

putting it on the  
little finger of  
Qi the scribe and  
(in a tone almost  
dialektik/military  
almost) say to  
him “down and to  
the bone...”

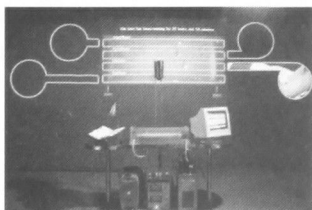
(crackk...) 

*Translated by Todd Ramón Ochoa*

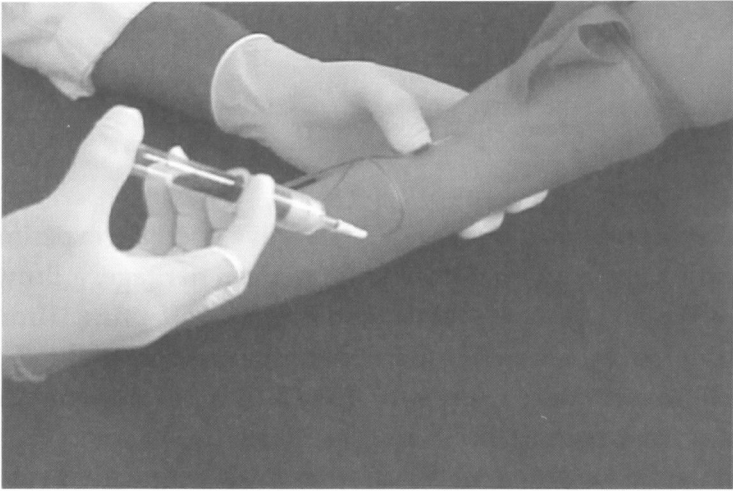


PAUL VANOUSE  
FROM THE RELATIVE VELOCITY INSCRIPTION DEVICE

*The Relative Velocity Inscription Device (RVID)* is a live scientific experiment using the DNA of one particular family of Jamaican/American heritage: a Brown (Jamaican-born) mother, a White (U.S.-born) father, and their two offspring. (Ironically, one of the subjects in this family, referred to throughout the protocol as “brother,” is also the principal investigator of this very project.) The RVID is a race about race using actual skin color genes from each of the family members as the four competitors. The experiment uses a process called “gel electrophoresis,” which allows us to discern the different rates at which fragments of the family members’ DNA from genes affecting skin color move through an electrically polarized gelatin. The computer-regulated scientific experiment allows the entire process to unfold live in the space of public display. The project merges contemporary DNA separation technologies with early twentieth-century interest in human genetics, particularly the 1929 *Race Crossing in Jamaica* study by the Eugenicist Charles B. Davenport.



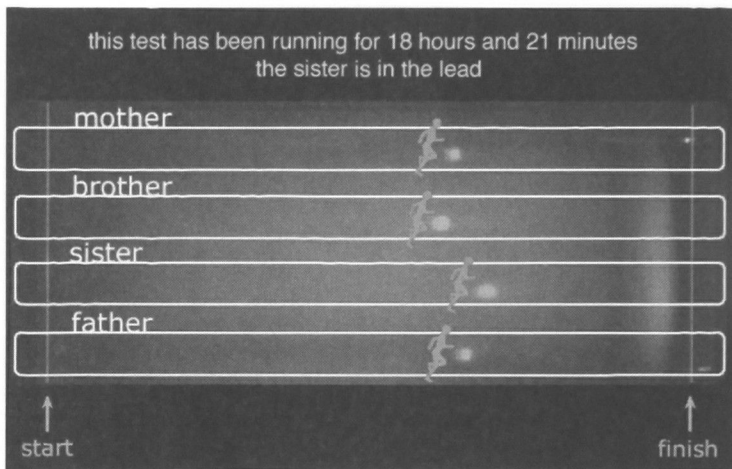
See *Mandorla* cover image:  
Installation View  
Henry Art Gallery  
Seattle, WA, April 2002



Dr. Dare drawing blood from Melissa Vanouse  
("sister") in Buffalo, NY, October 2001.



During exhibitions, fresh DNA is inserted into the electrophoresis gel every two to three days.



A live video image of the RVID electrophoresis gel with graphical overlays. The four bright dots are individual DNA samples from the four family members, which are glowing because of UV light irradiation below the gel.

JULIO TRUJILLO  
CUATRO POEMAS

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CENTENARIO ∞

Para Luigi Amara,  
que ha visto la palmera

Barullo de cantina.  
La discusión de al lado,  
el manoteo,  
el ruidoso ritual de la amistad  
se cumplen con idéntica pasión  
aquí y en China.  
Por la ventana veo pasar  
una palmera.  
Se va,  
se va,  
la palmera que pasaba  
ya se ha ido.  
Al lado continúan.

Uno de ellos, de pie,  
explica en qué consiste un sombrero.

## EL MECANISMO ∞

Una minúscula polea  
conecta  
dos puntos con sistemas giratorios  
que procuran tensión.

Uno de ellos va engarzado a un engranaje  
rico en muescas y molares  
con lujo sincronizado  
(se llena y se vacía sin angustia).  
Cada pestaña hace uso del aceite  
que le permite andar —como demiurgo—  
hacia ningún lugar.

El otro mueve y es movido  
por un brazo de bronce  
que apresa en su otro extremo un delicado  
hueso de ala (falso,  
pero amenaza sutilmente con volar  
o hacerse añicos).

Hay un resorte que aparenta

titubear,  
pero es preciso en su labor ambigua  
de traer  
y trayendo alejar.

¿Quién hace el usufructo de ese nervio?:  
una trizada pieza perforada  
(e inocua al iris).  
Dos laminillas transparentes se sujetan  
—queriendo sublimarse—  
de esa nada.

Visto en su todo  
(apenas concebible panorama,  
pero aquí está  
frente a los ojos parcelados)  
el mecanismo cumple una función,  
persigue un derrotero  
que yo ignoro.

SIEMPRE ESCRIBIENDO ∞

Ezra jugaba tenis con frecuencia,  
y dicen los que saben  
que su saque  
era una contorsión tan sorprendente  
que muchas veces se anotaba el tanto

más por el pasmo  
que por la pericia.

¿Acaso ignoran que el que saca  
dibuja un ideograma  
en el espacio?

TÍTULO ∞

Una sola cita goza del honor del loro: percha para ella sola,  
que de golpe se llama epígrafe.  
Julio Cortázar

Y luego la caída,  
desplome en el que abrir  
o cerrar los ojos  
da igual,  
poema a plomo  
en el que Julio y yo,  
altos y fumando  
(pero él mucho más alto,  
y fumaba mejor sus Gauloises  
que yo mis Delicados),  
trabamos esta alianza que es fugaz  
y duradera:  
el humo se destrenza y se disipa,  
pero el loro ya es verde para siempre. ☒



JACQUELINE LOSS

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VINTAGE SOVIETS IN POST-COLD WAR CUBA

Some years ago, a map posted between cars on an Italian train captivated my then Croatian partner and me. Italy's neighbor, still emboldened and contoured, was now designated as "Region Formerly Known as Yugoslavia." His disorientation was apparent. What happens to the denizens and even exiles of such nominative voids? That the present limbo could only be read through the past was startling, in part, because of the honest manner in which the phrase confronted ambiguity. A single word "Yugoslavia" recalled a recently passed collective dream, as well as an individual's youth and young adulthood. The present and future were negligible. Navigating with an ideological compass brings us to another complex category.

"Transitions" look ahead, but they only denote the desired ideological outcome. They point "toward" democracy, but what is to be done with all that stuff, those memories, that just won't fit within that model? Unlike the former phrase, "transition" generally refers to temporal and not geographical states, but it wants in its erasure of a previous condition from the symbolic field. Authoritarian governments that persistently reminded subjects of the regime's own importance through symbols, slogans, and celebrations, are momentarily cast aside in order to think about the future. Eventually, sociological discourse tends to address what national subjects do in the absence of their national father and the glue that once bound them together in their own exceptionality. However, it is frequently up to art to provide a more shaded panorama of the complex possibilities of certain historical legacies.

Although using the term *transition* with respect to Cuba is premature and incomprehensive, this is how the last decade or so has frequently been referred to from the outside. As Victor Fowler observes, the 'after' to Fidel Castro's regime will resemble very little the experience of Germans after the collapse of the Berlin Wall in which "thousands of citizens of the East [were] walking through the streets of capitalism, contemplating, awed by the store-windows that were filled with things that they dreamed of or heard about but never saw" (43).<sup>1</sup> Because Cubans have been living since 1993 with a dual economy, they have grown accustomed to the appearance of capitalism.<sup>2</sup> Castro described the situation as "The Special Period in Times of Peace," a category that refuses to consider violent shifts. To call Cuba's current situation a transition is more prescriptive than actual. The approximately three-decade-long relation between Cuba and the Soviet Union is sometimes described as a marriage, but one that ended with little remorse. The latter's departure has meant that the former has had to reorient itself and re-envision paradigms of morality, culture, trade and development. Besides having had to reinvent its infrastructure after 1989 when the Soviet Union cut the subsidies it sent to the island, Cuba has had to begin reconciling a chaotic superstructure. On a seemingly more humane and almost compensatory note, it has been frequently reported that the Cuban national spirit was relieved to have had reneged certain obligations. No longer would Cubans be obliged to celebrate the U.S.S.R.'s national holidays and shout another nation's 'universal' slogan, as they had done for so many years. When asked to recall their experiences, Cubans tend to describe the limited contact that they had with actual Russians during the Soviet Period due to separate living quarters and business establishments, but they also reminisce about experiences with Russian individuals then and now. The Russian brides who remained continue to be a topic of discussion and even investigation, for instance. There is definitely a split between how Cubans reflect on the public imposition of a foreign language and political philosophies, translated into pedagogical strategies as well as codes of conduct, and on how they remember personal experiences of individual Russians or of particular elements of culture disseminated through film and literature. This latter point generates varied responses.

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<sup>1</sup> Spanish reads "miles de ciudadanos de la parte Este caminando por las calles del capitalismo, contemplando extasiados las vidrieras llenas de cosas soñadas o escuchadas, pero nunca vistas" (43). Victor Fowler. "The Day After," in *Cuba y el día después*. Ed. Ivan de la Nuéz, Barcelona: Mondadori, 2001: 37-49.

<sup>2</sup> In that year, the dollar was legalized.

In 1980, Manuel Pereira made an overly zealous appreciation of the Soviet Union the theme of his novel, *El ruso*, in which an idiosyncratic Cuban youngster named “el ruso” quixotically mediates early 1960s’ Cuba, consumed by this exotic sphere. Two decades after that fictive assessment, news reports on the 2000 visit of Russian president, Vladimir Putin, the first to make a visit to Cuba since that of Mijail Gorbachev in 1989, suggest that none of this other culture actually stuck. A Russian who lived thirteen years in Cuba stated that: “cubanos y rusos son pueblos con una cultura y una idiosincracia tan diferentes que la fusión era imposible y la influencia mínima.” A Cuban similarly discounts the penetration: “No quedó nada, no bailamos como los rusos, no comemos como los rusos y ni siquiera bebemos vodka.”<sup>3</sup> What the reports did dare to convey about the remains of the marriage were the immense number of Russian names on the island—Boris, Yuri and the likes; cautiously nostalgic representations of “good deals” at Russian stores in Cuba; the presence of “*Lourdes*,” the one Russian military facility still on the island; and finally the Russian president’s experience of speaking in his native tongue about literature with several Cuban representatives.

The collective filter to the world that the Soviet Union provided Cuba has disappeared, but just because the Soviet Union has disintegrated, does not mean it has departed from the imaginations of Cubans. Such superficial protest against contamination is always questionable. In fact, in its very disintegration, the Soviet Union has begun to expand and morph in contemporary Cuban culture. Some artists today are playing with its leftovers, and in so doing, they challenge the consequences of the life of this nation in “*Transition*,” by questioning the limits of a historically ideological authoritarianism and pervasive neoliberalism.

In the U.S.A. we are continually reminded of the symbolic weight of vintage—from period pieces to retro fashion to old-time automobiles, the velocity of the production of nostalgia is outstanding. The vintage aesthetic of Cuban culture is compelling, but so is “the vintage” as a critical field within contemporary Cuban culture. At an exhibition of internationally recognized artist Antonio Eligio (Tonel) in Old Havana in July 2003, even more than by the irony which we have come to expect of this artist, I was struck by the familiarity and warmth with which he portrayed Soviet-Cuban unions in outer-space advancement. Into a fascinating assemblage of objects, photographs of an international team of scientists, and etchings, Tonel also

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<sup>3</sup> See Reuters’ report, “*Décadas de presencia soviética en Cuba, dejan sus huellas.*” <http://www.conexioncubana.net/realidad/cuba/sovieticos.htm>.

places his grandfather, Antonio. The installation narrative says that he led the team of scientists between 1962 and 1970. This insertion nuances the historical quest for progress and makes spectators feel almost as if they were traversing a family photo album inextricably linked to disappearing moments in national history. While critics have addressed the influence of Soviet Union in Cuban plastic arts, they have not caught up with the thematic of links to the Soviet Union in literature. As a result, my own inquiries have led me to the writings of Anna Lidia Vega Serova, Adelaida Fernández de Juan, Wendy Guerra, Antonio José Ponte, Antonio Armenteros, Victor Fowler-Calzada, Reina María Rodríguez, Jesús Pérez, and José Manuel Prieto.<sup>4</sup>

These artistic renderings of 1960s' and 1970s' Cuba are more than facile aesthetic trends. They can be critical of the relation between Cuba and the Soviet Union, but we oughtn't expect them to entirely revile it. One of the most fascinating performances of a complicated transnationalism and reflective nostalgia is encountered in the music and videos of the alternative punk rock band *Porno para Ricardo*. Here, a distinct version of a familiar photo album is toyed with, charismatically executed in the eclectic moddish punk style of lead singer Gorki Luis Aguila Carrasco. The band finds an acerbic plenitude of expression by combining references to the U.S. punk / metal band of the early 1990s called *Porno For Pyros*, Lou Reed, Russian cartoons, ("los muñequitos rusos"), and even the Communist International. We can thus affirm that Putin's official interlocutors are not the only ones who can communicate in Russian. At least, on some imitative level, so can the members of this band whose very name threatens to destabilize the national codes of conduct with its admission of pornography.<sup>5</sup> Their song entitled "Los músicos de Bremen" plays with the 1969 Soviet cartoon adaptation of the Brothers Grimm fairytale, delivered punk-rock style in the language of this other idiosyncratic people.<sup>6</sup> In Miami, Russian cartoons have been stockpiled and most recently in that city, Ramón Williams has presented his new video work called "Cuerpo Luminoso," inspired by those Russian cartoons he used to see in the 1970s. That said, it may still come as a surprise that traces of "los muñequitos rusos" are also locatable in the work of these musicians born in the 1960s and 1970s congregating in and around the neighborhood of Playa in Havana.

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<sup>4</sup> These writers pose diverse questions that I will be addressing elsewhere.

<sup>5</sup> In April 2003, the band's thirty-five-year-old lead singer Aguila Carrasco was arrested and in August 2003, he was sentenced to four years' imprisonment.


<sup>6</sup> Memories of "Los músicos de Bremen" are diverse. The contestatory Cuban comedy group "Punto y coma" performs a rendition. Additionally, in Moscow, in the year 2000, a new version of the cartoon aired.

The homage involved in parody, discussed in the criticism of Linda Hutcheon, does not escape either the music or the videos of *Porno para Ricardo*, and in this way, I would suggest that *Porno* is utmosty Cuban in its attempts to ever so comically grapple with this historical period. On par with the vintage aesthetic of the music are the videos of director Ernesto René, who recently won an honorable mention in the Premios Lucas for the video accompanying this very theme. René's "Los músicos de Bremen" is filled with images of all that journalistic reports insisted Cubans were excited to see go—Soviet pedagogy, red stars, as well as hammer and sickles.

At the beginning of the video, rapid clips ground spectators in television cartoons. Then the camera zooms in on a map of the Soviet Union in a classroom where the musicians pose as unusually nerdy-looking Cubans dressed in Bermuda shorts with dark-rimmed glasses. As if in an ideological and aesthetic flashback, the musicians splatter red paint on their rehearsal room. Run-down Lada automobiles—those same Ladas of the news reports of Putin's visits—are captured by the camera. Male subjects digging up the urban streets jog the Cuban memory of the 1970s' sugar harvest in a uniquely warm and empathic manner. This approach, perhaps somewhat startling to outsiders who are more familiar with the human oppression of such desired agricultural outcomes, can be explained partially by the temporal distance, but also by the last decade's less than sanguine experiences of a dual economy. The resulting differences between the haves and the have-nots undoubtedly temper these artists' recollection of their youth and of the universal, Soviet-style idealism in which they were inculcated. The gaze of its director reflects an element of insane harmony in the strange, collage-like experience. The video humorously concludes with a display across the screen of, among other words: "Pashiva" (Thank you), "Stonia," "Croacia," and finally "Koniek" (The End).

This is not to say that the video does not treat more critically the residues of this transnational union as well as the current state of affairs on the island. The abandon and isolation that emerges out of an experience of insularity as well as out of the restrictive governmental policies toward travel are easily read. In contrast to the more quaint beginning of the recorded version of the song, sounds of static introduce the struggle to get reception. The video's principal female stands on a rooftop talking on a cordless phone as she watches cartoon figurines of airplanes and birds fly away. Then she points the antenna toward the planes desperately begging for a signal to communicate with the world, reminding spectators of the video's initial static. It is clear that travel, let alone communication with the outside, is impeded. At once, she labors to traverse the city. Although there is an exaggerated, almost cartoon-like quality to her

movements and appearance, one of the most pressing socio-economic problems facing Cuba today, transportation, takes center stage. In the past, the world was accessed principally through the Soviet Union. Its removal entails a sincere sense of isolation. An aesthetic counterpart to the ideological imposition is super-imposed images that allow the cracks in the system to be seen. Sociopolitical impositions are alluded to aesthetically through the video's superimpositions of cartoon-like figures that convey a field beyond the actual filmed video. They point to an expansive temporal framework as well as to the 'cracks' within the legacy of history on the present.

While stagnancy and immobility, thematic staples in representations of Cuba, are concerns of this three-minute video, so are cultural movements, in a way that contrasts with the imposition of capitalism implied in the term *transition*. The bubbly red and white letters that dance across one of the final segments of the video declaring "esta guitarra es rusa" clearly suggest the principal trade relations with the Soviets. While this may be a sign that soon the Russians will dance off the stage entirely, it is important to archive this seemingly minor detail. The way in which this band converts these leftovers into the experience of contemporaneity is negligibly evident in socio-political categories and reports. Creative attempts at reckoning with the Cuban-Soviet union translate a very Cuban reality that escapes commitments to transitions. 

JOSÉ KOZER  
FOUR POEMS

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SYLVIA, DO YOU REMEMBER ∞

Sylvia, do you remember the women of the house, how hard they worked.  
It always seemed that father did nothing.

Smoking his short birch pipe hands clasped behind him he paced like a  
rabbi, mysterious in a cloud of smoke.

Looking back it seems to me there was something asiatic about him.  
Maybe he had been a lord of Bessarabia who had freed his serfs in the  
days of the Czar,

or perhaps he would rest in the oat fields and at threshing-time bent  
over sleepily sit in his threadbare  
coat in a damp place among the ferns.

I imagine he'd become transfixed upon discovering on the steppe an  
apple tree

He who knew nothing of the sea.

Doubtless he would struggle with the image of foam, confusing anemones  
for sky

Even the weeping mass of eucalyptus leaves would have frightened him.  
Imagine then what he must have felt when Rosa Luxemburg, tract in hand,  
appeared before the Czar's court.

Forced to emigrate from Odessa to Vienna, Rome, Istanbul, Quebec,  
Ottawa, New York.

Weary of traveling poor father would arrive in Havana like one document  
and five passports.

Do you remember his return from the Muralla Street stores, the women  
of the house quivering with excitement.

I swear to you that when he entered through the livingroom door in two-  
toned shoes a striped blue suit and a thin  
tie decorated with ovals

it would seem that papa had done nothing at all.

## LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT ∞

The truth is I only care about words, not every word (I don't care for the  
word word, if truth be told) snow isn't a word I  
care for (I don't care to be cold, and snow—I mean  
to say lyric snow—has become so commonplace)  
one less word now: and for the letter n there are  
others. A multitude. Nabob, an exotic word—not the  
least chance to use it, a sonorous word, but there's  
an overabundance of sonorous words, we can dis-  
card it: what's left? The fugitive image of any word,  
lacking an image leaves a concept (leaping inside  
us) it crumbles: in truth I care not at all for the word  
nothing, abstractions leave me limp with boredom,  
tepid tepid abstractions: I want to see and touch  
(above all touch); I want to sniff the spoor of the  
word buckwheat, my god, how many combina-  
tions: the words are mill-stones turning; whatever  
word a mill-vane broken into syllables; and on the  
shore the dying, what does it say. **Marah, marah:**  
is that what it says? I listen closely, nothing but in-  
terference; and I taste, I crush a stem of purslane  
against my palate, but it clarifies or tells me noth-  
ing now: here on the edge, manna, masquerade are  
the remaining words, backward, or forward to this  
place, at the edge: what, to what to speak with  
words: listen to me, the bread that I've put on the  
table parts, down to the center of its husk, brings  
forth ash (ants brought forth once more): and then,



what. The things are obscured by so much thought, classification and description, description doesn't bring the chameleon back to the chameleon, doesn't bring back the mother, doesn't bring anything back to us, let us yield, that the jacaranda of this life is passing, I am **homet** (the lizard): nothing. A green thing that lost its tail. The masquerade of her whose veil is dropped, see the face's skull, the body's bones, skin of golgotha peeled away now: the donybrook I was once, now I hear myself and slide inwards: outside a lovely day. Euphrates. Much distance. A god of nickle or zinc can't cope with people, nitrogen has been enough to keep me alive. Spurious, but alive. With some or another word but not with every word. The word *Capulí* tells me nothing, it has nothing to do with me; dying, let's see, I can't adjust to its destiny: nor, finally, to the dictionary—too vast. At the final moment any word will do; linen, for instance, at that moment: the ark on one's shoulder, bread on the table, hand on head, and at the head's point of transcendence, be it the word wheatfield that I hear, for instance, in the yellow crossing of axles: or be it bread, by omission. And might I see made whole all crumbled things.

## THE TREE OF LIFE ∞

The Greater Antilles began to appear at the sound of a pigeon's flight.

The flight fashioned the contours of an island of the Greater Antilles; the island now of cyclones, guásima trees, the mother tongue finished finally with naming those things at their hearts unsoundable.

How else could one explain that the act of sealing the window would transpose from semi-darkness to a trackless light the snow covering the length and width of the nation, let the raven be left

alone in the midst of the squall, the light renders violet (within it) the fruit at the (puffed up) raven's foot, hunger only hunger could convince it to pick the skin from some animal, tossing it side to side across its shadow.

## ANATHEMA ∞

Old men, we read the headlines at the newsstand (we say kiosks, little kiosks we say, and thank god we argue over whatever synonym) and with a lifetime's experience imagine the rest: the rest, the remains, the graves: what's new, what will be, what could be new: and we watch ourselves watching ourselves watch ourselves, some slime or viscosity dangling from our nose (we blame the cold, sleep, dreams of cold reality or the chill of a dream about to end) what does it say there. Chamber of air, it says, it says earthly husk, and below? Below it says, among the unreadable, wrinkles, eczema, scabrous, and it says, in the unreadable (do you hear it?) scouring powder, sponge: we are fly-weight, we ruin the view for the passerby (the deity) walking arm in arm with his woman, our pepsins, chyme, demented phagocytes making manifest the leaves of a death that those lovers don't expect: fuck them. And we turn our backs on the latest news of the day, there is no day, no day for anyone, and that's our strategy: ballast of bones, the squeaking of a kid in shit, we blink, we wink, and it looks (look, look) at us (we guessed it) askance: the lovers, for example, reflections. They release each other's arms. The sun hides itself among thunderheads, plagued by sties, pus, piss, a yellow rain squall blinding itself to the blackness, our conjunctivitis: they

saw, they saw. Polyphemus saw, saw the miopic, and saw the nabi the present and future eucharist, the yellow and pestilential eucharist of couples that strolled past arm in arm. Judges and courts, appear: they're news of hollowness, news (stuffed) void; void, pulp. At its center, the flare of headlines, flying embers of the inorganic, alone we join our hands together (comparable to a vine, of course, no need to search for words, tradition supplies them, no need to rack our brains, enough, enough: neither surface nor sweetmeat nor falsehood, honor, dregs, we decline into sallowness; a couple of letters is all that's needed; an image blurred as the retina hardens, the condor soon will pick at you: baby food; diuretics; camomile; of flesh, boullion; and for stimulant a **memento mori** that we toss out the window (Defenestration of Death) to see it fall at the feet of the couple about to part at the building's entrance: good timing, in a few moments each will be alone in his own face, in front of some irreversible (sphere), some (irreversible) gadget, bleating now (panting) bellows, the bellows will continue changing him: we are a stupid inflamed vulva, about to crown, fecal water: we give up. Now everything is lost (laughter). The philococcus yawns in our noses and its putrid breath scorches us: we are its concubine. By pondering, by diving inwards, we loose a good-natured wind, wild, we scare away the masses, the young lovers, run to the festivals, run to the forests, love (love thy neighbor as you, what? what? sonorous coronet) procreate (certainly) more prose, more gametes, another yellow chunk of nitroglycerin. ☒

*Translated by Mark Weiss*

TAMARA KAMENSZAIN  
CUATRO POEMAS

---

EXILIO ∞

Cuatro consonantes se pegan  
al remitente pringoso  
de una postal. Calcomanía  
comprada en el mercado de San Ángel  
el sobre que huele a maíz dice  
Familia Kamenzain  
y adentro los quiero, los extraño, me quedo  
no visité sinagogas ni visité cementerios  
me consta la catedral del Zócalo  
desde el fondo mismo  
de lo que sería creer  
por Dios  
no hace falta convertirse  
para ver azteca  
por el monitor del museo  
se refractan nuestros cráneos dorados  
contra los vidrios de Inmigración

“gente de la calle” buscando bares abiertos  
hueros del D. F. los que allá éramos morochos  
gringos de California los que allá  
fuimos rubios.

México es lo que se dice  
una postal  
en la mirada muralista de cada parroquiano  
un poema del primer Gironde  
abriría los bares de Plaza Garibaldi  
hasta los baños de puertas batientes  
entraría el maestro su metáfora  
bienintencionada.

Yo me quedo afuera  
quiero creer que me mandaste mariachis  
una serenata sin metáforas me pertenece  
no hay palabras para el sonido metálico  
a las cinco de la mañana  
en la ventana dormida de casa.

Como vocales hebreas  
consonantes cristianas  
mi México es casi muda  
se pronuncia  
cruzando el desierto a los 40  
comulgando *matzá* con la boca seca  
restos de cal en el riñón  
sedimento rolado de tortillas  
en los dobleces de cada papiro  
tacho Mar Muerto  
pongo Océano Pacífico  
me quedo más tranquila ensobro  
y agrego al dorso  
TKDF.

## GENTILES ∞

La diferencia la anota dios  
en el espejo del desorden genético  
si me miro descuento mi doble  
si te veo agrego tu mitad.  
Diferencia idéntica  
hace reír de tanto parecemos  
área a la semita judea al ario  
locos sueltos tapiados juntos  
protegidos a la intemperie inalámbrica  
como animales ante su propio entierro  
por los restos del campo.  
En ese hogar descampado  
en ese perímetro que nos concentraba  
yo soy aquella que por vos morí  
y por tu gentileza soy también  
la que te dejó

morir.

Dios nos archivará distintos  
en su libro de los parentescos  
en el viejo yo vos en el nuevo  
dos testamentos a la fosa común  
y después  
que nos identifiquen.

## KADDISH ∞

¿Qué es un padre?  
Sueño que todavía lo tengo.  
No me recen al oído  
porque me despiertan.

¿Qué es un padre?  
Sueño que todavía lo tengo.  
Diez hombres lo invocan el lunes  
en una ronda de inútiles  
plegarias.

¿Qué es un padre?  
Diez hombres lo invocan el martes  
en un espacio sin él  
su idioma  
resuena extranjero.

¿Qué es un padre?  
En mi casa de él  
forman el *minián*.  
Es miércoles  
puertas adentro dormida  
rezan hasta despertarme.

¿Qué es un padre?  
El jueves voy a saberlo  
porque siguen reunidos  
en su nombre.

¿Qué es un padre?  
Diez hombres no alcanzan  
para cerrar el viernes  
en un círculo masculino  
que adentro me libere  
huérfana.

¿Qué es un padre?  
Con la primera estrella

llega el *shabbat*  
y todavía no tengo respuesta.  
Ellos se dispersaron pero yo  
hija de Tuvia ben Biniamin  
seguiré buscando despierta  
para después  
poder olvidarme.

## JUDÍOS ∞

Somos los de la kombi “Corcovado”  
portuñoles tirando de las faldas  
de un guía  
que a los pies macizos del redentor  
pone los brazos en cruz como diciendo:  
hasta aquí llegamos.  
Algo de la altura nos marea  
es una percusión que se eleva de los otros,  
*fantasias* golpeando en redondo ellos avanzan  
sobre su carnaval de todos una bandera  
que dice *escola* nos desorienta más  
porque al tam tam de las voces se suman  
las nuestras también ya somos disfrazados  
una fauna dejada de la mano de dios  
los que bailan y los que ven bailar  
inauguramos el mismo carnaval  
2001 y todo es como siempre  
al otro lado del Cristo el precipicio  
y todos sin embargo marchamos  
esta marcha de ciegos  
sobre los pasos que le debemos a la música  
loca fantasía de una escuela de vida  
donde se aprende golpe a golpe



que los de arriba y los de abajo  
que los de abajo con los de arriba son distintos  
diferentes a costa de lo mismo  
son al borde mismo de un idéntico abismo  
el tamboril que adelanta si detiene  
su tam tam para el santo y seña:  
hasta aquí llegamos.

## II

Pero hay más.

Nosotros

los de la kombi en éxtasis foráneo  
vamos a dejar nuestros disfraces de hotel  
vamos a colgar nuestra bermuda en estandarte  
de una ventana abierta al *morro*  
y que nos reconozcan.

Pueblito que baja y se pierde  
ni raza ni nación ni religión  
del argentino la parte en camiseta  
(lo que transpira destiñe al Che)  
hay una diáspora subida al Corcovado  
parte por parte acudimos a esa cruz  
sin raza sin nacionalidad sin religión  
ya fuimos clavados pero aún no somos  
tan portuñoles tan ladinos tan idishistas  
no somos suicidas aquí no ha pasado nada  
sólo se trata de lúmpenes peregrinaciones  
de un día más por Río de Janeiro  
visa de turista boleto de ida y vuelta  
no empujen ya quedamos atrás  
pasó de largo la parada del milenio  
bájense ahora todos

precipiten

que hasta aquí llegamos. ☒

[anabasis]

2:10 PM 9.20.02 Turn left onto  
Main fr. College. Black ink?  
Saturn is the bringer of old age.  
Hwy 74 2:25 PM. Try maintain 70 mph  
A line I wd have written at 15: in Sept.  
the fields crescendo w/ corn.  
Gustav Holst 7 mvmts of the Planets.  
We move now to your anus, the magician.

How you bombed me in the pimple.

It was unusual Lois who bombed me in the pimple

from high in the cold mountains

She was somewhere in the timber wood

in a dirty cabin of the purplest mtn.

She whistles to her dog there.

That is the home of the lady  
who bombed me in the pimple.

85.8 m Welcome to Indiana  
Crossroads of America.  
What about her caused her to walk  
purposely into

What had caused her to walk w/  
terrible deliberation

past the dark farm of her strong and angry  
daughter  
down then cross the digitalis peppered hill  
over two string-like creeks and a yarn-like ditch, past

a clot of 4 sleeping ducks and under  
the blonde-green dreadlocks of a shivering willow

the flaps of skin on my head I call  
my ears

drinking from a bright can  
I realized after driving 210.9 miles that the reason I was upset was not b/c  
the steering wheel still seemed misaligned despite the 59 dollars  
but that my scrotum had been folded tightly under my perineum.  
Whatever warm thought-induced anaesthesia had erased or edited the  
messages dispatched from my distressed scrotum across western  
Illinois, whatever mental epidural had thrown its body against the door  
of my medulla oblongata as I drove, the Thermopylae of my spinal cord,  
this protective force had been overrun and I was now in pain

tussus feculence dottles. Urinic  
Why had she bombed my pimple. It was not an ornery pimple. Had I some  
redoubt on it? Some consolate outpost busy with typists. What but the white  
basilica of the pus-bleb rode the broad bailey of my pimple?

sebum. The slick field of sebum  
spreading into the plains of my face  
Brookville OH 267.4 m Exit 21

itty majiggers  
6:43-6:54 Gas Stop  
@ 276 m

Was Lois, the odd lady who bombed  
my pimple, devoid of good regard  
for me? Was there an indefatigable  
contumely against acne?

339 m to Junction 270 N  
Whom among us shd have our  
pimples bombed!  
emotional incontinence  
flaccid diction

“tactical overdeployment” of the  
word “love” D F Wallace  
which, I submit, ...  
hypertonically  
what lonely, odd, intricately paisled  
cosmology wd cause her to  
deploy  
to induce  
Why was not my pimple antipodal to  
her lonely purple mortar-bearing mtn?

Punitive use of ordnance against  
my pimple

As if a bell had rung deep in my face  
and my jaw vibrated w/ it  
my jaw's reverberation from the bell  
that had rung coldly beneath my  
bone (zygoma) the vibration's paths became complex  
when they entered the 6 flaps of  
skin that delimit the front and sides  
of my face namely my ears, the

2 circular flaps of epidural constitutive of  
my nostrils, & the 2 intricate  
flaps of muscle that are  
the facial labia. beneath my nostrils

a mouth being a toothed bubble. exordium

Had the bombing reduced the ability of  
my face to display affect?

Catachretic b.s.

the weighty boom of the shell as it  
burst on my pustule  
reverberated  
around the topography of my head.

The mortar shell landed at the  
very top of the conical pimple  
w/ a sonorous boomlet  
cutting away the top & leaving a  
small caldera a semi-solid lake  
of blood and long-anchored pus.

My crazy illness of booze  
and crying so heavily that  
had I built a levy upon my cheek  
it would have drowned the Cortusa of my chin

Adolescence's prevailing theme's  
the eruption of pimples, the  
elongation of the groin, extension  
of the nipples forward, hips  
sideways, buttocks backward  
and tongues & lips that outward go clucking  
& wooing toward other lips & tongues  
Sleep fr. 2:30-7 AM EST at 672 m

the tongue, that flip arbiter of  
language and want. that  
deft electrical flap. That  
welcome mat of the head.

Autumnal buttocks their  
pear-like sag:

One of the great enigmas  
Exit 20 Prov 12:58 PM EST 1094.8 m  
Arrive M & M & C 1097.2

[katabasis]

8:32 AM Fill on gas get  
2 old fashions 9.22.02 Sunday  
1 m from M&M&C.

The best cup of coffee I ever had was  
driving south on Hwy 95 of Providence RI.  
The first sip was taken 21.3 m S of the  
city. Speed 71 mph. Cloudless sky.

40 m fr. m's door CT border. 9:10 AM EST  
Arkansas Balladeer Convention

An Arkansas balladeer singing of  
the sacrifices of mail carriers  
91.3 NPR SE CT  
Large white spider on windshield  
in the lee of the wipers been there  
since Prov. probably fell fr. a tree  
Above M's driveway 55.9 m from Prov.

"The life of the poet is one  
of ease, happiness, constant joy,  
freedom"  
— Maxine Hong Kingston

NPR 91.3 FM 59.2 m fr. Prov.  
Stupid voice: open throat whisper

Taste guards lies.

“We all have it.” “Poetry is everywhere  
all around us.” M. Hong Kingston  
To be The Poet Harvard UP Kingston sounds  
defensive suspicious smug

Exit 69 Hwy 9 N. 70 m fr. Prov.  
Can't stand the voice of Garrison  
Keiler. It's saccharin. Lee-Ann  
Hansen has a fake laugh.

Boston's Transit Police uses classical  
music as a crime deterrent as a  
youth repellent  
90.5 NPR Hwy 9 78 m

Samuel Barber's Adagio for Strings

Haddam & Higganum

Barreling down the macadam  
btw Haddam & Higganum  
I passed a lady there  
selling aspirin n laudanum

at the corner of Crimea and  
East-to-West Higgallum

107 m. 91 S to 691 W

TOM  
TAD  
TIM

Had she been selling  
lingerie & encomia  
or an encomium to lingerie  
I might have stopped.  
But I didn't.

Some kind of penitentiary just  
inside NY border, Caramel NY  
160 m fr. Prov. 11 AM EST  
Wrong: that was a factory.

Frid. Night I was gassing in Easter  
Ohio & I met a guy on the pump  
opposite wearing a uniform & gassing a  
white nondescript van. He'd queried me  
re where I'm fr. in IL (plates), asked b/c  
he'd been there, drives all over, he'd been to  
B/N. Said his job was extradition  
movement of prisoners fr. place to place. Said  
it keeps him on his toes.

183 m fr. Prov. here's the penitentiary  
Peekskill NY ? New 9D Junction to  
Weppinger Falls Beacon  
Exit 11  
185 m Hudson River bridge over.  
"The Hamilton Fish  
Newburgh Beacon"

A fart: ventloquism  
DONUT CHYME.  
DONUT. CHYME. BOLUS. FECES. DUNG. SOIL  
Wheat. Donut Chyme Bolus  
FECES DUNG SOIL WHEAT DONUT  
CHYME BOLUS FECES DUNG SOIL  
Wheat DONUT This assuming we  
make donut fr. wheat. What if we make  
donut from feces scooping it directly  
from the rectum Feces DONUT CHYME  
BOLUS FECES DONUT NO this wd



short circuit the AGRICO-DIGESTIVE Cycle  
Snipping the mobius loop of nutrition  
and splicing out photosynthetic regeneration of  
nitro-carbonic compounds.  
Beverly is the only proper name  
that I can think of at the moment that  
cd serve as an ADVERB

225 fr. Prov. PA Border

Hwy 84

DAVID FOSTER WALLACE IS TURGID  
NAY BOMBASTIC: "Luminous intensity of  
the light"? yeah he wrote that

I suspect that a "respect for authority"  
is merely a respect for socio-economic  
capital. This "respect for authority" bears  
a concomitant & converse disrespect for  
those w/ out socio-economic capital.  
The idea, furthermore, of a "moral authority" is  
contradictio de adjectivo. True morality cannot  
be buttressed w/ doctrine nor scaffolded  
w/ law. Executive & legislative power can  
sometimes be allied w/ morality but that is not  
license to confuse the two.

MLA registration. Insurance. Call Mom re sitting  
Lackawanna historical society.  
Of interest to the women of Jenkins  
are the men of Wilkes-Wray

7.412 gallons 1:19-1:30 stop to fill on. Had to wash  
car by hand in front b/c truck  
got diesel oil on car via its  
exhaust maybe  
Ask M. if she'd like to use my  
desktop

Ears are like an early kind of seashell stapled to the  
sides of our heads

Lewisburg PA 365 m fr. Prov.  
near Exit 210 80 w

The left & right versions of the  
seashell are the male & female sexes  
of the species and yr head  
is the mechanism they use to mate  
Yr head is in fact a pod utilized  
to facilitate the mating of yr ears.  
They are copulating right now, behind yr  
face, somewhere just above — & slightly  
behind yr. throat.

My jaws are ransacking yr lips.  
393 m fr. Prov. those impressive  
immense cut-cakes of cliffs.  
It is not even my lips that are  
searching & rummaging over yrs  
It is my whole jaw. My very head is  
frisking yr head searching the 2  
fleshy grenadiers posted at the gatehouse of yr talk yard.  
exit 48 Hwy 80 w Exit 2 miles  
Emlenton PA 529 m fr. Prov.  
4:36 PM EST.

Ave speed since departure 66 MPH

After gassing up in Drums, PA at  
1:25 PM (the time is now 5:02 PM) I  
ground the starter for the 1st time  
Clio said yesterday she doesn't  
like my beard. Very high whine to  
the tires 560 m fr. Prov, 12 M fr  
Ohio border.

1st strong signs of autumnal  
chromatic metamorphoses in the leaves:  
a few minutes west of Youngstown OH  
Pale yellow in what appear to be alder  
ocherous reds too just west of  
bridge over Meander Reservoir.

649 m fr. Prov. Junction Hwy 71 S.

6:25 PM EST Columbus 101 m

Send dead flies to Julie, her parents,  
X-tian, Margaret, Wm & Christine,  
My parents, Jean, Cheryl, Terry, Denise  
Carolyn, Rita, Sara, Sarah, Bill Ransom,  
Nancy Taylor, Bill Arney, Raley, Poch, &  
all in Market 2001-2002 folder

STOP TO PEE at 676 m rest stop 71 S  
(1st pee today at 1:27 PM) 6:55 PM

That was an utterly ill-designed  
reststop fr the ingress pt to the  
egress and the bathroom was

small rains  
throughout  
Ohio  
Dotty not  
Splattery rains

Dot-inducing rains 1-3 millimeter dots.  
Bug splats rare those that do  
appear on windscreen are fr lepidopterae  
(the wing dust colors them)  
(No apians or dragonflies, no dipterae or  
mosquitoes). Sun crisply & orange in the  
east south east 55 m N of Columbus Just  
above the tree line occluded by the crests of  
many low hills.

7:20 EST Sun flickering through the  
trees & low roadside bushes. Overhead  
sky still very bright pink & blue &  
gray electrical vanilla. Headlights  
bright beads string behind me in the

rearview mirror. An entire bank of  
immense trees appears on eastern  
side of HWY & is stoutly bearing up  
against a huge wave of flamingo pink  
fire splashed off the sunset. The reflection  
fr. the lit bank of trees is at once  
pink & green. 7:30 quick glimpse of the sun as it trips into  
a dark thin fuzzily dentate line of trees & falls into the horizon.  
Dusk has begun.

I like the voice of Etta James.

Faith & Justice Radio Show  
95.1 FM Columbus

Often at night I dream  
of the little yam of yr womb

847 m fr. Prov. IN/OH border

What is an emergency but a  
sudden, aversion-based need  
to move things along quickly. It is a  
calendrical problem

10:21 STOP TO URINATE 895 m  
fr. Prov.

10:25 on hwy again  
4 minute stop

Also send dead fly to Jordan Davis

Road construction is pipe organ  
music gone wrong.

[pipedreams.org](http://pipedreams.org)  
— Michael Barone

I make 74 W 937 m 10:05 CT

My favorite instrument is the pipe organ.

Lavasoft — spyware freeware  
download & install

Kim Komando Show

1. Scandisk

2. defrag

leave alone duplicate DLL files

1009 m = IL Border 11:05 PM CT

11:15 PM PEE STOP 1020 m

11:19 PM on road again  
Salt Kettle Rest Area, IL

technological

3.97 million blocks of stone  
2.5 tons each on average  
in the Great Pyramid  
fr. 12-16 tons at bottom to  
1/2 ton at top

artbell.com

gizapower.com

must buy toothbrush

Wm Rosenberg he was 86, founder of Dunkin' Donuts  
died today 9.21.02 in Cape Cod

1093 Exit into BL, IL  
exit 135

Buzz Aldrin, 72 yrs, punches  
37 yr old man debunker of moon  
landing

1096.6 m fr. Prov arrive BL 

RUBÉN DARÍO  
TO ROOSEVELT

---

It is with the voice of the Bible, or the verse of Walt Whitman  
that I advance upon you now, Hunter!  
Primitive and modern, sensible and complicated,  
with something of Washington and a dash of Nimrod.

    You are the United States,  
you are the future invader  
of all that's innocent in America and its Indian blood,  
blood that still says Jesus Christ and speaks in Spanish.

You are a superb and strapping specimen of your people;  
you are cultured and capable; you oppose Tolstoy.  
You are a horse-whisperer, an assassinator of tigers,  
you are Alexander-Nebuchadnezzar.  
(You are a Professor of Energy  
as the whackjobs among us now say.)

You think that life is a fire,  
that progress is eruption  
and into whatever bones you shoot,  
you hit the future.

No.

The United States is powerful and huge.  
And when it shakes itself a deep temblor  
runs down the enormous vertebrae of the Andes.  
If it yells, its voice is like the ripping boom of the lion.  
It is just as Hugo said to Grant: "The stars are yours."  
(Glinting wanly, it raises itself, the Argentine sun,  
and the star of Chile rises too...) You are rich —  
you join the cult of Hercules with the cult of Mammon;  
and illuminating the way of easy conquest,  
"Freedom" has found its torch in New York.

But our America, which has had poets  
from the ancient times of Netzahualcoyotl,  
which has kept walking in the footprints of the great Bacchus  
(who had learned the Panic alphabet at one glance);  
which has consulted the stars, which has known Atlantis,  
(whose name comes down drumming to us in Plato),  
which has lived since the old times on the very light of this world,  
on the life of its fire, its perfume, its love,  
the America of the great Moctezuma, of the Inca,  
our America smelling of Christopher Columbus,  
our Catholic America, our Spanish America,  
the America in which the noble Cuauhtemoc said:  
"I am in no bed of roses": that same America  
which tumbles in the hurricanes and lives for Love,  
it lives, you men of Saxon eyes and Barbarian souls.  
And it dreams. And it loves, and it vibrates; and she is the daughter of the Sun.

Be very careful. Long live this Spanish America!  
The Spanish Lion has loosed a thousand cubs today: they are at large, Roosevelt,  
and if you are to snick us, outlunged and awed,  
in your claws of iron, you must become God himself, the alarming  
Rifleman and the hardened Hunter.

And though you count on everything, you lack  
the one thing needed:  
God. ☒

*Translated by Gabriel Gudding*

PAUL HOOVER  
CUATRO POEMAS

---

POLIÉSTER ∞

Sin verbo  
en la eternidad,

la ciudad es  
un guión de cine

en el que tú  
puedes escuchar

la voz  
de la distancia

cantando  
"Funky Town"

y es como  
un pez que jadea

el concepto  
de cielo,



una erguida  
infinitud donde

todo es todas las cosas.  
El táctil

mundo colapsa  
si te acercas

a mirarlo.  
La luz

se agota en  
la faz bronceína

de la sombra.  
En lo espeso

del tiempo,  
cada mundo

es una lectura  
subalimentada

por sus  
simulacros,

una alfombrada  
tierra del corazón

milagrosa  
y banal.

Observas  
la nueva decadencia

doblando cada  
esquina. Pero yo

no es el ojo  
y tú no eres

el tejo –anti-  
profético, de

la sonrisa esplendorosa.  
Al desvanecerte

en lo real,  
el placer es

hormonal y  
el concepto

de maravilla  
más o menos

fluorescente.  
El narcisista

objeto encuentra  
su espejo

empapado  
de atención.

Esa Polaroid  
del sol

refrescándose en  
tu mano

es una certidumbre  
y un hecho,

besando tu  
ojo en una

semi-extática  
duda que dice

el hombre  
es una rata,

la rata es  
una estrella.

## ESPEJO (INVIERNO) ∞

*Para Joe Brainard*

Cuando las ventanas  
son silenciosas  
y delgadas como el lenguaje,

la nieve cae sobre  
quebradas y valles.  
Todo cambia,

hasta los árboles  
dejan de respirar  
en el suave

aire nocturno. El  
mundo real brilla.  
Cuando una mano

descorre  
su cortina exponencial,  
el único *no*

expresado a lo largo  
de la secuencia  
sabe lo que sabe.

La condición del  
agua que espera por  
su forma en

el raudo  
fluir de las cosas  
en su congelación.

La nave espacial  
que regresa vacía a tierra,  
sus voces se escuchaban

hace un año  
en las grabaciones, estos signos  
que también penden

sobre la historia, donde  
el dios desalentado  
duerme bocarriba.

En ese lugar  
secreto, una sencilla  
rama, estricta de

atención, pestañea  
en tu ojo. Gracias  
apetito de cielo

y también las  
últimas hojas verdes  
del canto, delgadas en

el golpe de viento, donde  
las casas más profundas  
se hundían y se alza

brillante humo. Ni  
esto ni

aquello, ni siquiera

el invierno preguntando  
qué buscas  
en la tarde breve,

que por supuesto  
es pálida en  
fría luz de veranda.

Estar sin  
habla la solitaria  
plataforma: un toque

póstumo o  
el aliento que en sus  
arreas da vueltas y

vueltas. No hay  
nada que el sol  
no pueda explicar,

nada demasiado claro  
para el hielo de  
la mente sumergida

en su estación como  
cuerpo y deseo,  
*arbol y creencia.*

## EL PROLÍFICO Y EL DEVORADOR ∞

En aforismos de verano,  
el gato lustroso se estira en prolífica maravilla.  
El señor y la señora Popcorn y el público rugen,  
y toda la basura de la historia cae una vez más,

entre la pornografía y el cuento.

Somos libres sólo de negar nuestra propia libertad,  
dijo el Nietzscheano en pantalones.  
Pero no está bien por cierto quedarse en lo trascendente  
como en un campo vacío. Ha sido decidido  
(y no por el comité) que las personas somos reales,  
pero los sucesos mismos irradian el error.  
Los experimentamos como a través de una cortina de vidrio.

Entusiasmarse con el tema de las minas,  
a la noche cubrir el cuerpo con una serie de pesadas telas  
o con el cuadro de la pared, son también perfección.  
Perfección, que siempre halla un rincón donde  
culpar a sus dudas, vergüenza y repugnancia  
por su propia vocación, y su orgullo en cuestiones de amor.

Hay siempre una paciente obligación  
que espera inocular el polvo de lo remoto  
en cabeza necesaria. El ojo se desorbita  
ante el sancocho de lo nuevo, como si lo viejo importara.  
Sus confiadas poses ante el golpe de nervios.

En la penumbra de un cuarto, con la lógica del cuerpo,  
mantén la lengua privada, la lengua en su nido.  
Agotado de creer, es un verdadero creyente  
e incluso nombrarlo un acto primitivo.

Los dioses han sido gentiles en su desnuda semejanza.  
Los hemos visto saludar hacia el origen de la ciudad.  
En el campamento fantasma, al límite  
de la laguna de piedra, el viento se ha vestido de bienvenida.

La familia ansiosa por cerrar el caso,  
dícese después de un crimen. Desplazar el horror  
hacia una segunda mente, no resucitar nada  
que no sea finalmente placer, sea moderno y reptílico.  
Pero la primera mente recuerda el relámpago del campo  
de piedras.

O, Y VERDE ∞

medida sin dibujo  
pasado sin historia  
a qué altura  
el mediodía entra  
jugando con sus puertas...

y esto mucho después  
se presenta en el lenguaje  
no en la percepción

el blanco  
dibujo del campo  
una secuencia de viejo hueso

al filo de la contemplación  
planificada como textura  
estamos jugando  
un juego de apariencia

el *que* del mundo se escurre  
a la mano del lenguaje

decir otro  
y querer decir cuchillo  
entre los reptiles del bar

voces emocionales  
manos en agua:  
espías sin ojos  
de una velada insatisfecha

la cálida mente amortajada  
ocurrente y astuta  
cargamos con rumores


quienes no podemos soportar

silencio o medida  
    la breve articulación  
del infinito

cada curva del agua  
    vuelve a trazar la luz  
se dobla viendo apenas

el patrón por el cual  
profundizando el fondo  
    echa a galopar el cuarto ojo

la huella de una pisada va  
    directa hasta estas ventanas

arena que vuela ciudad de arena  
    por la costa  
inquieta 

*Traducción de Omar Pérez*



JAVIER MARIMÓN

---

TWO POEMS

ON LEAVING THE MOVIES ∞

*We can cross the street, you said.*

It was an option. But we didn't have to do it.

Walking with you felt uncomfortable.

It seemed as if we were going nowhere, it wasn't our fault;  
but that of every observation, of the obstructed phrase.

Also, we had no money.

We musn't lose emotional accuracy.

Every one of your words ended in a hole.

We stretched out to sunbathe there: they were industrial pipes.

*Get out of there*, yelled the crane operator.

It was impossible to relax.

You didn't speak for a while.

You were recovering too obediently.

*The return home is monotonous*, you said.

I noticed you were trying to make poetry, to verbalize.

It was never like that before.

There was a stubbornness in my own brow.

With my orange glasses, my house appeared the house of some other place;

Jesters, queens, and sea urchins stepped aside.

I was the grown sailor returning home.

We were good friends, couldn't be better.

## ON LEAVING MATANZAS ∞

An old man sitting on a bench extended his white legs  
towards the sun.

Ligaments break, they are destroyed;  
some are paid to destroy.

Leaving Matanzas, I could not penetrate a portion of  
his cryptic breath,  
his white legs stretched out to the sun.

On a street in Matanzas,  
the destroyer was putting the key's hole around his little finger.

He was able to do it several times. The sky turned red.

The destroyer paused on street corners,  
he let cars cross.

The destroyer telephoned his son.

He told him that on corners he let cars cross.

And the reddened sky.

An ocean of voices and thoughts crossed between them,  
in the space of the telephone. It was painful to think of other lives.

Talking became difficult, being oneself and not the others.

The destroyer tried to fit the key's hole around his finger.

He was able to do it several times.

The son goes out on the lit terrace to smoke.

I go out to think about the quick beings of the telephone.

The Empire State B. flows gently in the night.

Then in the morning mist. ☒

*Translated by Rosa Alcalá*

ELIZABETH HATMAKER

---

THREE POEMS

GO ∞

The verb in three movements  
Like the shifting of gears, effortless,  
The slight push onward, slow-drug,

is the sentiment of high registers and careless love,  
so high we forget.

to be: you and I, on, what? the sentimental journey for sentimental reasons  
in such a mood  
that movement forgets, careless so far beyond the lyric, the hum of tears, sentimental  
landscapes in the rearview mirror. We know the words. or

to move: miles and miles ahead, and it's luxury I tell you, with the radio, *oh love, oh love, oh,*  
*careless love* (Handy-William-Koenig, 2:44). I'm asking you.

The repetitions themselves are careless as lyrics are overcome by force momentarily,  
by where the music goes careless

and fractures its own intentions, force yields force  
yields movement yields

the need to be gone.

We are like this, yes? We rage towards  
the end, except

the end is a verb, becomes movement, or light movement at the corner of the register,  
bouncing back momentarily, upper and outest.

DESIRE: 7 ∞

I watch television and note  
how some people (old people,  
persons of travel & leisure)  
are buried on tropical islands,  
not like where they had been born  
but like them,  
and I practice the talk of love.  
I, otherwise, practice  
the talk of television.

(however, the talk of love in mind...living love on tropical islands in mind...  
fuck love-beyond-the-grave...

this is glamour, action.

A woman of small travel, 150 miles and no change of landscape,  
with music talking about love; *it's a five-o'clock world when the whistle blows*  
and people leaving the country on business.

the business of television, action, and  
*no one's got a piece of my time*  
played out like the talking of drama.

CUBA ∞

The intersection occurs between the street where I live, the idea of moving toward  
downward exits at an airport, and Cuba.

Here, Cuba is a space of floods, of swimming across areas of water and climbing over the embankments to find new pools of water in an otherwise barren field behind a series of houses on the street on which I live.


There are just-made connections in a Chicago airport terminal situated underground, the place having a sense of urgency, of actions behind the wall and crowds. There are trains here, making the faster intervals between myself and Chicago seem haphazard, a thing which happens often.

A man with the makings of a film star lives in an old Victorian house next door to me. He is attractive and his whole life has crashed in on him so that he has nothing to lose. He and I drink together on occasion and the talk of friendship is apparent, the talk of sex seeming inevitable and possible.

There comes an evening with a vision created in his second floor window. The man with the makings of a film star is sitting on a chair and I can only see the back of his head. A girl scout appears; her sash is full of merit badges telling the stories lacking in her face. Suddenly she kneels and is obscured beneath the window ledge and I know what she is doing. Later he calls me and is ashamed although he does not elaborate. He wants me to come over and talk and I am crushed because I was not the novelty of his vision.

Swimming in Cuba is necessary, walking outside of the street on which I live to endless swimming and hoisting myself over merging embankments.

But the man with the makings of a film star proves to be elusive. People ask where he has gone and I don't know.

I always have a sense of familial obligation, that my family will move in on me and make me their child and that I won't have a date. They move. 

REYNALDO JIMÉNEZ  
SUBURB

---

CONTRA EL RELENTE LA TIPA  
gotea: escucho el sol cortezas  
tripas de antiguos futuros

CON INSOMNIO PUNZÓ LA HIEL  
planetas solubles azules se apagan

HORIZONTE A SER TRAGADO CRIN  
astral adonde óseas orquestas suturan  
quedad primera el príncipe afán

ESTE MONODIÓS PERPLEJO LUEGO  
de la mordida que lo rajara de lesos muros  
librado del poder rendido queda clandestino


QUIEN GANARA PELEA PRESA QUEDA  
del deseo a su raíz única hembra vuelta  
harén dendrita veladura tras el gris gas

CARONTE CON MÁSCARA DE CRONOS  
vela por descarte o cartesiana piel  
entre los términos

RASCA EL CUERO EL ABISMO  
no cuadra ni confiere subluz afán  
de fiera súbita fiesta confidente

NO LEO LO ANTERIOR. ANEXO EL ZZZ.  
Chispas en la albúmina-letra,  
estas provincias desunidas  
de luz desnudas. Desprevenir.

No uno este cielo.  
Quito el otro.  
Ser de adobe.  
Cimbr.

Toco a Venus, nua, lua.  
Lo anterior entra tatuado  
hasta la córnea.  
Comedero de pájaros 

NATHANIEL MACKEY

---

SONG OF THE ANDOUMBOULOU: 51

—*cargo cult*—

Took the wheel, put in a cassette  
and we pulled out. We bid the Inn  
of Many Monikers goodbye, pulled  
away  
wanting never to come back...  
Nunca was at the wheel, namesake  
chauffeur we made-believe  
we believed in, stiff-backed  
ecstatics that we were...  
Something  
new was on the tape so we perked  
up. What we heard stole tone from  
arrival, the where we'd eventually  
be. It wasn't limbo what we did,  
we  
sat up straight, backs ironing-board  
stiff,  
not limbo where we were, a kind of  
loop we were in... It wasn't lost we'd



have said we were, we reconnoitered,  
Lone

Coast itineracy long since understood,  
iffed and averred, we called it verge...

We were inland. Crab amble called out  
from hills we saw in the distance,  
implicate sound sewn into Nunca's  
cassette... Morning light lit the

plain,

a boon to the yet-to-awaken. Verge  
gave way to green, green que te quiero  
verde, Spain it suddenly was we were  
in... No sooner Spain than it was  
somewhere known as Adnah we came to

next,

everyone went around on all fours. Animal  
surmise local parlance proclaimed it.  
No sooner were we there than we moved on...

Erstwhile Anuncia was at the wheel,

albeit

of what began to change. What had been a  
car became a van became a bus ad infinitum,

an

ambulance whatever it otherwise was, wounded

crew

that we were, an ambulance notwithstanding we  
sat up straight... We rounded the bend and what  
we wanted was there, satiety's rival tone a  
rendition of soul we were slow to accept...

Leaned inward, sat up straight, crab  
auspices' outward list compensated, Nunca's  
demiurgic wheel Anuncia's long remembered  
kiss gone south... Crash we'd have  
remembered gone blank... Anansic

bend

we'd have been caught in, webbed

had we

not leaned

in

---

And so withstood it. Stood, insofar as  
we stood, where standing flew into  
welter. Braced, borne onward, up, sat up  
straight. Nunca was at the wheel...

Never  
so much as made eye contact, never took  
her eyes off the road. Never turned her  
head our way or acknowledged us, never,  
not so much as a nod... We sat in back. It  
wasn't passengers we were so much as  
cargo,  
stiff-backed ecstasies though we were, that  
we were. Nunca, eyes glued to the road,  
was  
also cargo. The road, eyes on it as  
they were, was  
all there  
was

•

A dub cut came on the tape, took us  
back to Adnah. A curve taken too fast  
took us out... Tossed out of the car,  
we ended up on all fours, moved  
crablike,  
sideways, forward, back... It wasn't  
limbo  
what we did or inverse limbo, bent  
forward albeit we were. It wasn't limbo it  
was or wasn't we were in. On all fours  
we rummaged around among earth smells,  
burrowed, buried our heads in high  
grass...

The curve that had taken us out stayed  
with us. Centrifugal drift pulled us  
every which way. Bass got the better  
of treble, treble bass, reverb rubbed  
it in... It wasn't, looks notwithstanding,  
helter  
skelter. Crab auspices had worked out a plan...  
It  
wasn't innocent animality we sought or asserted, no  
exemption unencumbered our way. We scraped our  
knees and the heels of our hands moving crablike,  
movement seen seconds before so quick it  
seemed,  
movement we recalled from Lone Coast... It  
wasn't limbo we were in or that we limbo'd  
our way there, wasn't that it was or it  
wasn't.  
Crab Alley's outer precinct it seemed,  
nervous tether, dub echo's anansic net...

It wasn't spiderlike or spiders we were,  
net notwithstanding, not eight legs

we had, only four... It wasn't spiders we  
were  
down on the ground like, it wasn't we were  
children  
at play. We were on all fours greening our knees  
and the palms of our hands on the lawn we were  
on, had it been a lawn we were on. Heads  
in high grass, it wasn't a lawn we were on, it  
wasn't we were children again. Vibration got  
the  
better of shell, we shook, scurried, tether rubbed  
reverb  
in... It wasn't roots we were after, we moved  
sideways, crab auspices' back-and-forth  
behest. We were on all fours encased in  
crystalline light, root like swine  
though we did, our noses in the undergrowth...  
It  
wasn't horses mounted by loas we were, we were  
crabs,  
nose around like swine though we did. It wasn't  
an epic we were in, nose around though we  
did, it wasn't that it was or it wasn't...  
Morning light bounced facet to facet. A  
beveled  
glass it might've been we  
were in

•  
 Millenarian drift invaded Nunca's  
 cassette. Whatever it was we rode we  
 dozed off in, peripatetic bedroom,  
 hospital ward, belly to belly  
 on the seat farthest back the  
 incendiary  
 two we were motored by... Morning  
 light lit the way and again it  
 was gone, a ghost what before had  
 been solid, crab auspices' endowment  
 up  
 in smoke. So set the stage for again setting  
 out, finger and ring to one another the  
 two who lay sleeping, ideal we who awoke  
 lay taken from... Merciless the loop we  
 were  
 wound in, dreamt and utopic Two the  
 arrived-at One we were leaving for. Tape  
 rolled and we rolled with it. Nunca was  
 at the wheel, we sat in back... All but  
 as far back as the two we were motored  
 by...  
 It wasn't we were what they were dreaming  
 or that  
 they were dreaming, wasn't we were dreaming  
 them. No "it was" was at the back of our  
 vessel, no unraveling... The two who lay  
 entwined farthest back lay without dreaming.  
 It wasn't that it was or that it wasn't.  
 No "it  
 was" could be made of it, pure  
 dispatch

---

To ride was a well gone to too often, a  
dry world we circumambulated suddenly  
awash, Anuncia's belated largesse. The  
road was all there was and ride was all  
we did. Curves and bends kept at us, we  
giggled,  
giddy anyone was  
at the  
wheel ☒

JOSÉ LEZAMA LIMA

---

THE ASCENT

The ladder up the tree  
and the tree beside the house  
lift the sleeping white tablecloth  
by its middle crease.  
An ant climbs up the ladder,  
a deer catching its balance  
with horns dipped in the moon.  
A crowd is ascending,  
but the ladder is immune  
to the weight of climbing feet,  
including buttons and laces.  
One side is heavier, his arms  
flailing, the ladder is finally  
erased in the ascent.  
His head through the rooftop,  
there, with eyes sealed, his hands  
feel the bat's fine  
fur, with great-blue-heron glances  
invented at dawn.  
The bat is transformed into eyes  
that begin darting up the rungs.  
He reinforces the ascending hollows,  
eyes twisted by the gush of wind  
that erases the body's writhing.  
Like a lance, the ladder pierces

the floppy hat of the nodding attic.  
There, a clap of thunder bears witness  
to the arm, and the rungs become  
the line of the horizon.

December & 1971 

*Translated by Roberto Tejada*



ALFONSO D' AQUINO  
POEMAS

---

NUDO ∞

(ñ)

El verbo de la víbora secreta  
una substancia primordial y sustantiva  
que es la víbora misma

*Y alevemente sube  
rosa espuma verde nube*

La [gran] serpiente original  
que un universo de [vidrio] desenrosca  
y en un verso se repliega

*Y va tendiendo sus velos  
entre eucaliptos y truenos*

En su piel el [movimiento] del astro  
y la circularidad de la sangre  
se [consuman] en la copa del árbol

*Y flota como en un sueño  
el universo del velo*

Circunda la [estela] la piel de cristal  
se inquieta en el [aire] la roca erigida  
y el árbol tatuado pretende volar

*Es el sueño de la sierpe  
que alienta sobre la fuente*

Silbaba una [rama] del árbol  
sílabas [desnudas] que no dicen [alba]  
aliento o resina que [atrae] a los pájaros

*Tela de viejos dibujos  
víbora que sueña el mundo*

Persigue la sierpe su infinito [anhelo]  
y [copia] a la roca su respiración  
en lo más [profundo] de su [raso] sueño

*Y solos los hilos vibran  
tela de la fuente viva*

Oculto la tela la [estrella] secreta  
el [verbo] que sueña con el [universo]  
y silba la víbora su insondable hueso

*Y en el envés de su seda  
red de venenos despliega*

(c)

la morada mordedura de la *échis*

tiflópidos glaucónidos ilisídos uropéltidos  
boideos coluridos amblicefálidos vipéridos

todas y cada una de las víboras sin nombre  
por la pura palabra que las dice y desdice  
y las pone por gracia de sí misma  
en la punta de mi lengua que mal dice

*la materia primordial  
envuelta en verde retal*

*dipsas hypnalis hemorrohois y praester*  
sueño sangre sudor y sed

—¡ay las víboras!

la mayoría son negras o cenizas  
pero hay también algunas rotas y otras blandas  
“sótrato dice que la *dipsás* es blanca  
pero tiene dos franjas negras en la cola”  
los mordidos por ella arden de sed  
se inflaman en deseos desusados  
y beben sin médula y al instinto revientan  
de desasosiegos y de ser en la tierra de sal

su melodía se impone azul oscura  
y la sangre brota por la nariz y por la bota  
el herido orina un ágata sanguina  
y sus vetas erinias laten en sordina

que si encuentran una víbora muerta la visten y en una rama la cuelgan

las draconcópedas son grandes serpientes rosadas  
con cara de muchachas asustadas  
sus lenguas guindas sus escalas rotas  
sus hojas de vidrio  
si les secas los ojos le vuelven al salir  
si les curtes la cola la envuelve a creer  
su lengua es fina larva y niebla  
filiforme y húmeda

*entre brocado y brocado  
va atravesando los prados*

sin nombre propio  
que se apropie de lo otro  
una y todas hechas mola  
sin envés ni formón ni fin ni forja  
y sin forma ni sombra de ella sola

que 7 mujeres soñaron que daban a luz una serpiente y lo que parieron fue  
una piedra

arborícolas noctívagas aéreas  
crepusculares o marianas arenosas otoñales  
celestes soterradas acústicas diurnas  
terrestres y linfáticas  
intestinales serpentines igníferos y cósmicos  
silvestres y domésticas gatunas  
silvantes sibilantes sigilosas y mudas  
todas una  
a una

que una virgen dio a luz una serpiente con un punto amarillo en la frente

escamas labiodentales  
visión doble  
humor vítreo  
detección de astros infrarrojos  
rumor acuoso  
apercepción térmica

tumor pétreo  
víscera crepuscular  
neuronas multimodales  
y alvéolos violáceos

que los animales muertos por mordedura de serpiente se pudren más rápidamente

“un insignificante sepe que posee  
una capacidad de muerte cruel como ninguna”  
ella tiene su [luz]

*mitones de muselina  
a la víbora más fina*

mientras sus cabezas apuntan hacia todas partes  
y aun aquéllas separadas del tronco  
tratan por algún tiempo de morder  
sus cofias son largas o cortas  
truncas o afiladas  
y algunas terminan en una uña córnea

que el vestido que llevaba cuando mató a la serpiente al poco tiempo se puso verde

¿y los viboreznos...?  
ni verlos

que si las serpientes se anudan de las colas circula otra vez la sangre sola

que la divinidad se desarrolla a partir de una herida de animal

tengo mil cabezas

*herpestes vipera aspis  
lacerta coluber trionyx*

*boiga pseustes*

*naja naja*  
*natrrix maura*  
*anguis alba*

*oxybelis amphisbaena*  
*zaocys parda*

y serpentina  
mente  
transubstanciado  
Fanes el solitario  
preñado de sí mixto  
dio a luz otra serpiente  
que era... él mismo

## EL RÉSPED DE SU VERBO ∞

Trastoca trasnombra  
translúcida línea  
la víbora el verbo  
translínea su sombra

Obseso tatuaje  
hileras de manchas  
trasuda la estrella  
lenguaje de escamas

Trasmina trashoja  
miríadas de horas  
traslada trastumba  
traspasa la hoja

Desliza en el suelo  
su transversa vara  
que se transfigura  
en otra palabra


Su doble escritura  
de piel y su rastro  
transcribe en la arena  
las rutas del astro

Trasunto de linfa  
transluce en el vaso  
transfunde otra tinta  
la luz del ocaso

Arena o saliva  
transpone las letras  
y entre las espinas  
despliega su tela

Translúcida escama  
es cada palabra  
en su movimiento  
que no dice nada

Móvil escritura  
de esferas y fuerzas  
que alterna y transmuta  
en granos de arena

Traslapa su sueño  
trasnuda su silbo  
siempre vinculada  
al Verso divino  
y al precioso Signo 

OMAR PÉREZ

---

TWO POEMS FROM SOMETHING OF THE SACRED

EMPIRE FOR SALE ∞

A strip of land less than discovered and more than virgin—  
where the stag no longer shows his head at waterholes,  
with their excellent archers and execrable horsemen;  
where there are three wall-painted swans  
for every gannet of flesh and bone.

A strip of land for sale. Bring shiny glass checks.  
Everyone has a pocket-empire to sell at its own moment—  
I cede mine to you grain by grain, mahogany by mahogany.  
The price is rock-bottom, this forest is for sale.  
Some days we'll probably get cheated.  
Deals can close with ceremony but without the ceremonial pipe.  
A lukewarm empire awaits in waxed papers.  
We examine weeping utilities, stamps, and contracts  
as you'd peel layer after layer from a purple onion.

E. E. G. ASLEEP ∞

At twelve he took his first fall.  
At thirteen, okay, his psychomotor mechanisms



weren't entirely dysfunctional.  
There are no reports of convulsions or escapades involving rivers.  
There's no report citing any river at all.  
At seventeen he learned the song of the moment  
with all its choruses and improvisations.  
At twenty he was a not entirely unhappy guy;  
three years later, in his best period according to Eddy,  
the first symptoms of amnesia began to appear.  
He could memorize jingles only with terrible effort.  
At thirty he renounced the Friday night discotheque.  
He spent long hours examining his postcards of Okinawa:  
flakes of heavy snow on ebony bowls.  
He tried to reanimate his top hat, rabbit manufactory—  
they broke into mountain-wild dancing every eight hours.  
The doctors spoiled him, the family gave up on him  
and vice versa,  
but at that age he found all the tenderness of the Republic,  
and all the mnemonic resources of the world,  
insufficient. ☒

*Translated by Kristin Dykstra and Omar Pérez*

JAIME SAENZ  

---

FROM THE NIGHT (PART I)

~To my beloved friend, Carlos Alfredo Rivera

1.

The night, its rack of antlers twitching in the distance

the night locked in a box swallowed and re-swallowed by the night in the dresser  
in the nook

while my eyes and especially that space between my eyes and nostrils  
stretches out long as a two-story gutter

I'm startled and unnerved at the sudden fact—there's a tubular cocoon,  
spun from one eye to the other, through which I see only the night in its fractured  
and phantasmagoric phase

thanks to a force from who knows where the space of my dream has been  
split by a wall

on this side sleep is not possible and on the other it's perfectly possible but  
nevertheless thoroughly impossible

the wall, in fact, is not a wall but a live thing that writhes and throbs and  
this wall is me

with an inconceivable transparency that permits me access to the night's  
other side

to spaces where you might sleep in the overcoat of interminable sighs and  
aches and grief-giving terrors which home-in on your bones

the other side of night is a night without night, without earth, without  
abodes, without rooms, without furniture, unpeopled

there is absolutely nothing on the other side of the night

it's a world utterly without world, and to possess it you must become  
powerless to reach it

it's the dock at the very side of your body

and, at the same time, it's inconceivably remote.

2.

Through the high tension cables which trace the contour of the hills and  
then plunge to the fields

the night broadcasts itself in invisible sparks that flicker here, now there  
in the eyes and buttons of neighbors not yet taken by sleep

and who valorously stay fixed to the doors of their dwellings to witness  
the first onslaught of the night.

This first onslaught has, in truth, a mysterious source,

and no doubt it spurts up from the dead who have died for the sake of  
alcohol and who now swoon and babble at the vision dangled before them by the  
other side of the night,

and this has to do with the casks, the kegs, the bars, and the huge vats of alcohol dreamed each and every night by rounders known only to me,

and who, having drunk their whole life to the seams, writhe, screaming for alcohol, in atrocious spasms on soaked beds and in deep cloacas.

These rounders have learned plenty and they've got patience,  
and know the other side of the night has sunk itself into the shaft of their spines,

and gone down in their throats,

which retain forever the redolence of alcohol,

which is exactly what torments them unrelentingly, through the long, long time of the night on the other side of the night.

3.

Actually, the other side of the night is a supremely esoteric realm,  
and alcohol has conjured it.

No one can pass to the other side of the night;

the other side of the night is a forbidden dominion, and only the condemned enter there.

What is the nature of the night's other side?

To put it bluntly, it is the nature of the night's other side

to sink into your spine and acquire your eyes, to see through them what it can't see on its own.

And then a very odd thing happens:

at a certain moment you begin to see the other side of the night,  
and you realize with a start it is already inside you.

But this, of course, happens only with the great rounders.

It's exclusive to those who, having pitilessly drunk and drunk, have come, many times, within a hair's breadth of death.

It's something that just comes down on rounders demented by alcohol.

With those who can't go a minute without drinking.

With those who cut their sleep to a dram—two hours let's say—to concoct more time to drink.

With those whose eyes go white at the thought of being blown apart by alcohol.

With those.

Only on those will alcohol confer the grace of everlasting baptism on the other side of the night.

4.

The most painful, the most morbid and terrifying experience imaginable is without question the experience of alcohol.

And any walking stiff who wants it can get it.

It opens door after door.

It's an authentic path to knowledge, perhaps the most human of all,

though perilous *in extremis*.

And it shows itself to be so appalling, so terrible, its journey of rue and anguish,

that most would choose to stay on in death.

For any return from the other side of the night is sheer miracle.

And only the chosen accomplish it.

On your return, the world glares at you with malevolent eyes,

you are a stranger, an interloper, and you feel down to your bones how the world abhors your gaze;

what it wants is for you to wane and disappear—what it wants is your absence.

And since, all in all, you are the world,

do you see, you'll have to be very stalwart, very humble, very composed,

to face yourself

~which is to say, to face the world.

5.

Later on, the night will rush to your aid

~and just then, in the light of experiences that shook you,

many simple and also thorny things will be revealed.

For if there is no risk, no peril, if there is no twinge and insanity,  
there is nothing.

The day is for breathing, for greetings, for hauling furniture around and  
rearranging things;

the day of offices, of tell-me's and tell-you's and of placid optimists,  
and also of little loathings and full-tilt races to see who arrives first.

The day is the carapace of the world.

Not the night.

The night is the night.

The night, in the deepnesses, has had the last laugh—because the night  
writes,

to probe and discern.

The night lends itself to loss and disappearance, the better to be reborn  
and die in darkneses that signal and address you.

So the night's light is a light apart: many and curious things  
are lit up by night's light

~things go back to being what they are, and you come to be what you are.

6.

No one can near the night and undertake the labor of knowing it  
without first immersing himself in the horrors of alcohol.

Alcohol, in fact, opens the night's gates; the night, a secret and hermetic cell  
stuck in the suckhole of worlds,  
and its bowels can't be seen, but in panic and trembling.

Also, there are certain affinities with darkness, and those who lack them  
can't near the night.

Such affinities flourish under a sign that might seem contradictory to the  
uninitiated;

but this sign indicates by its nature, and a queer and unending dread of  
falling-by-the-wayside holds it together.

Thus an initiate in the night's secrets walks with a ginger step,  
as if suddenly struck blind or snapped off from any sense of space.

And this is truly a walk through the umbrae  
~is, in effect, a walk through the night's womb.

For an initiate will have lost the light forever,  
although, on the other hand, he can find it when he wants,  
ready as he is to pay its high price.

Because for he who dwells in the night; for he who enters the night and  
grows acquainted with the profundities of the night,

alcohol is light.

That his body turns transparent, that this transparency grants a vision of  
the other side of the night,

is due entirely to alcohol.



7.

That what I call the night goes on, and that you can still check it when you want to,

is a veritable miracle

~it's something I frankly can't explain.

Given the state of the world, one would expect to have to climb a cliff to find the night.

Truth told, it's astonishing the night hasn't been wiped from the face of the planet;

slain and vanquished forever, on the altars of human progress and to the greater glory of technology;

in the quest for radical solutions to the deracination of myth and the imaginary,

and also so that people work harder and sleep less.

One of these days, no doubt, they'll make the night really useful, zapping it with lasers and dosing it with who knows what kind of cobalt devices.

And I'll tell you the day isn't long in coming.

The night will drift into history, and it will be like the story of Noah's Arc, or the Tower of Babel,

so long as the challenge doesn't prove formidable, insurmountable even to the technicians.

With whom would you file complaint, if one of these days you wake to learn there will be no more night?

Before such morbid prospects, life and death dangle from extreme choices.

The first step will be to plunge into the pelt of the night for ever and always.

If they shatter the night, it wouldn't bother you;

the space in the night you occupy will go on being the night; it will be *your night*, in an inviolable space.

For all things crumble; absolutely everything. But space, space can't be breached.

8.

When I speak of pleasure and anguish, I mean learning; and I mean intimate knowledge.

Actually, I mean learning intimate knowledge;

because one thing is certain: it's not possible to know without first learning to know intimately.

And learning intimate knowledge is no easy thing: the body aches with it, it throbs here and throbs there, throbs all over.

A vague malaise grips you, and your body is no longer your own; it is a foreign thing and other.

And it's like a burden they've loaded on you and you've had to accept. So your eyes. So your tongue. So your head. So you, all of you.

A blaze of terror and atrabilium shoots through your body—no matter that your body is far, far away.

What pins you in place?

You might say it's not your body anymore. You might call it a crypt there by the road, sunless, airless, waterless.

It's time to learn to comprehend the incomprehensible; no one can explain it for you.

You have to *learn* your body. And your body, in turn, has to *learn*.

Actually an issue comes up, and it's crucial: you need a sense of humor, and composure.

Because you'll have to look sidewise, never dead-on. You couldn't, anyway.

That you've spent your whole life by the dock of death matters not a whit, and only infuses you with false security and loses you

in those moments rife with angst which are the key moments of learning, as when staring at death close-up, and identifying its body, and seeing it for the person it is,

at precisely those moments your defenses thin out, save for some wit and resolve.

For death is flesh and bone,

and you do well to remember, nothing keeps it from giving you the slip, from flaunting myriad, bogus forms,

while it plays, all the while, at death's little game, which begins in you and ends in me.

\* \* \*

What is this burden of anguish, of loss and perdition that wracks you?

Why does the world and all the world's things fill you with unfathomed woe?

Why do you hold back from weeping when you are racked through and through by the need to weep?

Someone stirs your guts around.

Someone is breathing faintly—someone beside you.

Look sidelong. There, watching you. Very close, a whisper away.

It's an extraordinary riddle. It's a person, I know it.

But no. Not a person.

Looking at you sidelong, with feigned indifference; it, the person.

And it knows you: you are not you.

It's a chair, a table, a blanket.

And it's a window, a breeze, a wall, a blow-fly buzzing in November.

And it's a thing just like me, or like you, that perhaps dies, just like me.

What could it be?

I don't know, but I know it intimately. 

*Translated by Forrest Gander and Kent Johnson*

THAD ZIOLKOWSKI  
DOS POEMAS

---

Pero sí, el pensamiento.  
Por tanto nada que puedas decir o escribir  
parió un hijo  
del fragmento uniforme que recuerda

el edificio  
o puede ser más exacto  
detrás del anverso de lo que pudiera ser visto como su silencio  
cuando miro el mundo y veo un cuadro  
que vendí

completar el pensamiento  
conforme se alzaba, sepultado ese año  
porque, con el tiempo, de todo lo concluido sobre ello  
sólo permanece el hecho de que sí sucedió  
hasta que ya no puede


comerse el cambio  
en dirección hacia aquellas aguas  
por las que consideró  
estarse moviendo

en todo caso

Lo que queda de lo que dicen las autoridades  
 son un hombre y una mujer  
 quienes vivían sobre la tienda de videos y fueron descubiertos  
 por los perros y una brigada de rescate, entre los escombros, humeando  
 ya sin llama, de lo que fue un edificio. Sólo hay sol  
 sobre las avenidas. Dentente

y espera mis señales. Estás en grave peligro. Estoy  
 incapacitado, comunícate  
 conmigo, porque estás  
 en grave peligro también.

A no ser que esté, por sí,  
 en llamas, algo en mí  
 explica, una mosca

puede encenderse sobre una ceniza, por todo el cielo, y quedarse  
 como fórmula, andamiaje de lo que  
 debiera haber sido otros  
 andamiajes. 

*Traducción de Roberto Tejada y Magali Tercero*

## REINA MARÍA RODRÍGUEZ

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### TWO POEMS

#### TWILIGHT'S IDOL ∞

my desire in the imprint of my fear . . . my desire is the imprint of my fear. in front of the mirror, a mature woman's serious face observes me (scarcity of soft pubic hair, once very black). thighs together, apart; together, apart, breasts (apart) with dark balls on the nipples like Aunt Adelfa's. my hand upon me. sagging buttocks, pathetic, flabby? a deity lurks behind my ear and something that doesn't come forward, isn't seen, moves me into the species, my mate, what more can I offer? my perfect foot which has not aged, so soft. I come together and separate strangely. I like my lyricism because it generates an I (an other) in my body which, behind the glass, slowly, sinks down on the bed and I open the windows so that the day's only low cloud enters with the glare. I undress, I undress and there's no me. I open and close my legs (expansion and contraction of the universe), it disappears around me, I pull myself together and I do nothing. any gesture would be all-powerful in the face of my expectations. lubricated, across from the mirror, I've just discovered my body and rejected it because sometimes it tries to possess a space, an obliqueness that distracts me from what is continuous, from the interruption of the landscape (intimacy contained in a small flowerpot with lilies). I am more than my body. my slenderness, its arrhythmia, oblation. the weekend, small and without ceremonies, how does one subvert the dark side of the self against those limits? I refuse to imagine myself again in those lines or silences that

culminate in yellow behind a shape and its emptiness (dark stain under the right buttock). poor crater. my self is not this. something more committed than acceptance or rejection; something lower and warmer than a surface (proud of controlling myself inside one self and not in another that splits me into two). this war has begun: when the flabbiness sprouts, it's mental. do you like my flabbiness? it is clear. are you obsessed with my poverty and the green excrement on the bottom of the pink cup? it's you, a broad body to break my intimacy, but I am not two: not living, not living involves life (life that is lived perishes and escapes) not loving, not loving involves love...not thinking, not thinking involves thought. she, with her robe threadbare at the elbows, in the afternoon she would rub her pubis with pieces of dry ice, she would rub and rub herself in front of the window, between the glare and the day's only low cloud. he would see her, a virginity for the northern ice (open lips for the burning cold of the dead ice). afterwards, she would wake up against the small hedge with the pain of her images. the cloud had disappeared. it would be, then, a false cloud born of her contact with the ice, a challenge to the landscape. each afternoon a suicide and the lost memory of the previous fall (because a suicide should be obsessive in itself), orgasmic leap, organ. run and take her, she too is me (the figure of my mother getting out of the old bathtub with her green eyes fixed on a girl's pubis), how awful not to be her anymore. you ask me to be indiscreet and whisper things in your ear. I get very close, but in vain. I don't have words, or songs, or other scenes opposite that leafy tree and the scent of those spiny weeds; they get tangled up in your fingers, just to be doing something. nothing that accepts me. I am my open, empty trap in its perfect transparency. with the metallic teeth underwater in the glass resisting an old age that overcomes my conscience, or a slice in time—open, still cutting—that makes me go down, pushing me to be, again, twilight's idol. there will be no more form, no body yielding in its curves, discordances, sinuousities: transitory odors that remain when I open the window and my legs and I ask forgiveness in the mud, just blood, dung curdling with blood (patience and meekness that slip on any mud), and the corner of the mouth smiles at me, obeying a strange purity by looking at me—the self already some other—not accepting her eternal return either (the object of the fantasy is evasive too). Narcissus, or man's love as impossible love (the play of the spirit will consist of turning objects into the creation of the subject, of taking reality as a ghost created by the author). the obsession with discovering her while she's falling over the dark hedge—nobody had warned me—to be simply a story that goes on repeating itself, consuming itself, slowly against the cloudbreaker.



## THE WORK ∞

we're sipping tea, as usual, under the imitation art nouveau lamp, they're gathered around the center of the table: the theologian, the astrologer, the critic, the researcher, the hippie, the producer, the functionary, the architect, the engineer, the dancer, the writer, the dalmatian dog, the editor, the screenwriter, a painter, the director and the singers. no one has taken a place outside the light, the brights and darks in the window of pretense: "like mercury sliding, like iron filings attracted by the magnet, the distracted people joined the group. the music began; the first note led to the second; the second to the third. then on the surface an opposing force was born, then another. they diverged at different levels . . ." they all need their own personal representations to survive, in different ways, but as a group separated from the center: the theologian teaches god—it's the place, he believes, where men don't discriminate against him; the astrologer prepares his chart and predicts even his next meal, I'm not joking. taking their positions seriously, they all aspire to some truth, to some consciousness of their motion (something useful for life implies something that leads each being to preservation in the self, according to Spinoza) all of them want to make their servitude prevail as a medium, or as a power to ward off death. they tried to express something. none of them saw the transparent heavens, any star, the final production in the middle of the dance... "we advance to different levels; some plucking flowers at the surface; others descending to wage war on the meaning; but all of us understanding; all of us included." how many crushed insects, burnt in that lamp, beneath that light which attracts only termites, intense fliers who aspire to reach the sun, to achieve clarity, to die then, enclosed there, at the last ending of a mediocre light... "like mercury sliding, like iron filings attracted by the magnet..." the intelligent friends and this sorrow of seeing them as they are under the flame of their half-fulfilled intentions, the flame of their minor interests tarnished by the greenish reflection, by the imitation of a lamp of no style at all, my small, my fragile friends! I hold fast, they drown, they drown me, I grab onto the profile of a swan in the corner of the painting, I pull it further under. the dancer rests her bare foot on the table, she flexes it and contracts it, golden. will there be another chance for me, for them? how can I know who I am, stripped of what I seem to be, of what I try to be moment by moment, of what I sometimes dream? and they, silhouetted between index finger and thumb, are they an entelechy too? I've disappeared under a cone of light behind them and they hardly see me. how do I sort out the capacity for emotion and the infinite feeling, if the expression is limited, it's only words, those little burn marks spotting the lower wings? the work does not exist, the

work does not exist anymore . . . “because the entire population of the mind’s immense depths arrived in a tumbling rush; coming from an absence of protection, from the removal of the skin; and dawn came, the blue of chaos and cacophony . . . the measure. brought together from the border of abysmal horrors, they crashed together; they reconciled themselves; they united. some relaxed the fingers on their hands; and others uncrossed their legs . . .” in the end, you’ve seen their gestures, the duration of their partially erased gestures between the light of the advancing nightfall and the terror of the dawn, which approaches in search of a window through which it can enter the show and throw itself into their faces, into the faces that didn’t go? it’s the instant for waiting no longer, for collecting the ashes, the remains of the perpetual cigarette in the practical fingers of the woman who keeps watch, the sun approaches and waits, another apparent vibration. everything happens because they should have made a choice, because we are always choosing, waving our antennae and there’s no reason in those choices that’s as lofty as our intuition: the director knows it. the moments are key, they have no space or time, but neither do they define anything beyond our failed choice, pressured by thousands of faraway mechanisms, just one false move of an antenna . . . “like iron filings attracted to the magnet . . .” can you defend me from myself? from the narrow circle of a life, a destiny, its schedules, a complicity? will you be able to summon the place—not the country—where this cone inside me could open out into another experience between tranquility and anxiety? the producer looks on with pale eyes, and gets up: a place for a dream, a space for a living man who can’t coexist, vulnerable and human, with the only enemy that could make him forget: reality. with your boots and your knapsack you can build that garden for the flowers, construct that hierarchy . . . eating some flowers at the surface; others descending to wage war on the meaning . . . will you be able to do it? is there a reason to do it? meanwhile, time is closing in upon itself, the space that it’s your turn to conceive. we’re drinking tea, as usual, under the art nouveau lamp that’s a true imitation. around the center, the silence has no pity for those who wait, it’s one more sleepwalker tonight who jumps off the balcony toward the dock while sleeping: with the silence it’s not the magic that’s destroyed, but the symbol . . . it’s another way of getting lost, a pause, the measure . . . “only dominated by the melody of the superficial sound, as well as by the warriors with plumed war helmets who waged war for separation . . . compelled by the call of the horizon’s confines . . .” our wings were damaged before we saw light and it was a long flight of humans, not of archangels; toward the most real reality, toward the image of the real. one can stay a long time in the image of the real. it’s the end of the work. ☒

*Translated by Kristin Dykstra and Nancy Gates Madsen*

GABRIEL BERNAL GRANADOS  
CUANDO DESPUÉS ES AHORA

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1.

Tres siglos, tres días han pasado de gozosa espera,  
cuando mirábamos el viento y las alas, que eran  
velas, el mar por el azul surcaban.

Había tres cartas y en la sien personas,  
herramientas por la gente mal usadas, —ellos  
que prefieren velar a dormir bajo faroles.

Hechos de viento tristemente, ella y yo, sin nubes,  
lentos de pena y de discurso, de ciego y vaguedad verbal,  
navegando por los campos bruscos...

2.

Si tomáramos la brida ¡qué durara!  
Hace cuánto si deseara  
si derramara la existencia / que por estas venas corre  
líquido fluido colosal  
en sí una barrera —del idioma—



“En los del monte senos escondidos,  
cóncavos de peñascos mal formados  
—de su aspereza menos defendidos  
que de su obscuridad asegurados—”

Véase un paisaje imaginario; pero la mano hurtaba la línea en el papel, refería en realidad —¿o con realismo?— una manipulación interna, un duelo metido en el duelo, una ausencia simulada en el desierto de otra ausencia, —¿su imagen propia?—; dos ausencias escindidas. El artificio huele a puro engaño en su densa representación del cuerpo... El cuaderno ahora descansa en la rodilla, un giro hacia los trazos reales, a las líneas; en homenaje a ti, a tu presencia, a tu falta de sentido o tula, a tu mar intercalado, a tus falanges y a la tinta.

Estando *En soledad confusa*. // Cuando claveles éramos tú y yo, / sin más gota. // El cielo —el mar acompasado— azul. // Cipreses en el aire, / veraneando.

Él se ovilla —dice—; se corporiza  
sin perder sustancia, y asma era sinónimo de ritmo.

#### 4. EL CAPITÁN BURTON

Un *ella* no figura más en mi horizonte,  
—se ha convertido en una triste imagen  
lapidaria, alejandrina y encallada más allá de mí;

sin el portal de la experiencia e  
ingrata donosura, el álgebra  
o el célibe tic tac sonoro  
en una fábula esdrújula.

Sin horizonte has dicho,  
como experiencia rara o nula  
—la vastedad es signo en el lenguaje,  
la vastedad real: el mar entre las letras,  
el intersticio,  
el lugar común tan temible

como un lunes de lápices enfermos,  
sin ideas ni imágenes alegres.

Cera para tus oídos  
y un cauterio para borrar las islas de tu cuerpo.

(Busco una bonita imagen, un metro  
bien sonoro, y *voilà!* ahí tenemos  
la poesía, la puta cuneiforme,  
el fiero alfanje de un negro otomano  
y las partes, porque al hombre han de medirlo  
con la vara de las partes, como el vaso,  
el caso tierno, general, de la forma  
o el agua en Gorostiza.)\*

5.

Sin sabiduría, sin olfato y sin Sem Tob. ☒

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\*La anécdota fue tomada del hecho verídico que vincula, antes de su muerte, a Luis Buñuel, al Capitán Burton (en una edición "americana" del Club Burton de su traducción de *Las mil y una noches*) y a un somalí de las notas concentradas en un volumen aparte, a quien la zona de su cuerpo mencionada en el poema le promediaba las rodillas. Buñuel leía el caso anotado por Burton —lo más seguro es que no había leído los otros volúmenes, enteros— y se desternillaba de risa.

PETER O'LEARY  
INNOCENT

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A NOTE TO THE READER ∞

"Innocent" is indebted to accounts found in *Alaskan Missionary Spirituality*, edited by Michael Oleska (Paulist Press, 1987). It is taken from "Holy Trinity," the second of three "icons" in a longer poem called "The Fire Balsam," which is based on the life & work of Russian iconographer Andrei Rublev. "The Fire Balsam" is part II of *An Icon of the Mouth*, an even longer poetic project, whose first part is *Garment & Raiment*, & whose third & concluding part, currently underway, is tentatively entitled *Aural Figures*.

*verst*: 1.607 kilometers

*bidarka*: a light Aleutian boat made of skins; a kayak

*klipts*: a wooden trap, powered by twisted rawhide, which catches its victim after the manner of a single tong working against a flat board.

INNOCENT ∞

In 1823, on May 7<sup>th</sup>, Ioann Veniaminov—  
born Ivan Popov in 1797 at Anginsk,  
a small Siberian village in the parish of Irkoutsk—  
left Russia on a raft drifting down the sluggish Lena

river, vast tracts along which no human bothered living. He strained after images. Drifts of light transfigured distances into presences. The world was traversed by prayer. Woolly horses snorted early air, leading eastward. From Yakutsk on horseback more than one thousand *versts* through tundra, then mountains & forests, the wilderness trailless & boggy, a muck the horses sunk into, hooves sealed in a vacuum; the streams were overflowed with rain & melting snow; at last to Okhotsk in Kamchatka where he boarded for Sitka, which he reached on July 29<sup>th</sup>, 1824, more than a full year of traveling. It was sunny. He had brought his family with him & some furniture. Cottons & leathers. A jackknife. One icon: Rublev's Holy Trinity, a copy from a copy, a parting gift from Klim, the clockmaker.

He took

his name from Bishop Veniamin, venerated, now his to perpetuate. A leaflet inscribed with verses from scripture, sewn in a flap in his jacket's front pocket, these:

*And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house,) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them. [Ezekiel 2:5]*

And:

*finally lead the struggler to the habit of praying truly, without forcing himself, purely and undistractedly, or to a state in which the mind is always in the heart. [The Monks Callistus & Ignatius, "Directions to the Hesychasts"]*

And finally:

*Prince to Light for whom the stars and the sky are turning a thousand times, turning a thousand times over, my praises are small jewels, my praises are small jewels. [Chant of a Tungus shaman].*

Irena

his wife embroidered these for Veniaminov. She knew he would not falter but she sought to give him pause. From his youth, Veniaminov could not be idle.

The Great Work,



he called it.

Alaskan language, customs, beliefs, traditions, he learned. He taught them carpentry, blacksmithing, brick-laying, clock-making. He took their mental pulses. Only rarely applying Xtian teachings. Rarely. He skimmed the Aleutian archipelago in a *bidarka*, solo. He translated the Gospel of St Matthew into Aleutian. The roughest adornment to the Russian Church, he called it. In his notebook, he recorded Aleutian legends, by hundreds. He built & bound churches with his own hands. He wrote an Aleutian grammar & a Kodiak grammar.

He saw the million fuels of Pacific stars, found them stranger than the blue Siberian fires remote now. He starved, sores festered, his wife wasted & died. He was tonsured. Made Bishop Innocent & when he died in Moscow in 1879, he was Metropolitan Innocent. A century later, he was named St. Innocent, Apostle to America, Illuminator of the Arctic Peoples, Visionary Architect of the Orthodox Church. He requested no eulogy be said over his remains, rather insisting: If a sermon is to be said, let this be your text:

*The steps of a man are ordered by the Lord.*

[Psalm 37:23]

How subtle were his fears in life? As exquisite as gout, a luxury of uric acid crystallizing in the knuckles? Or diffuse as an ice floe, each scattering chunk colliding but fluid, uninterrupted? What Dominations of wilderness fanned out above him, there?

In 1828 he wrote to Archbishop Michael:

Last month I made a *bidarka* journey to the island of Akoun, for the purpose of ministry. On coming to the beach, all the people of the village dressed in their best clothes were gathered on shore. They were there to receive me. I asked the meaning of this. They answered

that they knew I was coming & came out to greet me. I asked them how they knew & why they dressed up: How did you recognize me as Father Veniaminov?

Old man Smirennikov told us. Our shaman. Told us you started from Unalaska & would be here today. So we dressed.

Later I met old man Smirennikov. He was about sixty. He was believed to be a shaman. This man performed unexplainable manifestations. Some very striking: healing a woman of wounds from a *klipts* trap; summoning a whale when the village starved. His wonderful prophetic power was borne out by his knowledge of my movements at a distance so great that he could not possibly have known about me unless he possessed occult powers.

My desire was to know how he could know certain events ahead & by what means he cured sickness. Thanking me for putting these questions to him, he told me the following:

Shortly after I was baptized by Father Makarius, first one & then three men appeared to me. They were not visible to others, but I could see them & talk to them & they spoke to me. They had white faces & were dressed in clothing similar to the paintings in church (representing Archangel Gabriel).

These spirits told the old man they were sent there by God to teach the people & to guard them from harm. For thirty years, these spirits appeared to him almost daily. They instructed him in the tenets & mysteries of the faith.

These spirits rendered him, & through him to other people on the island, help in sickness, distress & trouble. The spirits always said they would ask God & if He were willing to help, the help would be received.

I asked him: How do they teach you to pray? He answered: They teach me to pray to God alone. To pray in spirit & from pure heart. They pray with me for long periods.

Father

Veniaminov wanted to meet this manifestation. The old man said he would ask them if they were willing. He asked & they agreed. Father Veniaminov wrote Archbishop Michael for permission to communicate with these spirits.

A year later he received a reply from the Archbishop.

When he arrived at the island again, he found that the old man had died.

The words *angel* & *messenger* were quartz crystals remote, perfect, alive for him. Bits of chainmail he coughed up from a spiritual lung.



Ofrenda del púrpura ∞

Púrpura profano, *animus* ♦ *anima*  
palabra inerte que parecía dormir...

púrpura insondable,  
mural  
firmamento de árbol, de río, de milivatio

*purple* - *murex* marítimo, abismal

: "*l'âme renonce*"

*purple dye* prístino. **M**e señala, ¿dónde voy?  
—memoria de aroma amargo—

**púrpura sangre profusa,**

resina proclive, CIMARRÓN,

*purple of Casio* profundo,

donde el fuego resbala púr

p

ur

a...

púrpura de Casio procaz

vocablo del clavel naciente ∞

O fertorio  
—el negro— ∞

*Negro:*

**R**ETIRO A LO INEXPRESABLE O

sintaxis de dimensión oculta alada

escin-de el borde del abismo....

negro luz

sable no-indicativo de **aura** profunda

tenebrosa - inaccesible

como *Éstige* el río...

átomo - sombra - átomo

**a sombr a** —*in the saccade*—

de prohibición entintada

tinta - negra - tinta

{rumora el sonido nocturno

—abstracto}

Negro de marfil:

austral

mancha pendenciera de peligroso genio...

enarbolada en lo hondo inescrutable del sueño

telón de fondo ~lontananza

[a veces] un consuelo

**Animal black** espiritual ✕

**C**omo el espionaje

legisla signos ~señas del no-sitio

~ código distintivo  
de lo presente ausente

~

**negro humo** ♦ boreal

[Inverness] - *there's no ingress*

n n n n n

niega y absorbe

todo color

*ivory black*

negronenúfar

nodal ...entre tono y tono el más bello - dice Monet

**P**oseedor de aura negativo

que sugiere lo siniestro:

disolución  
permanencia  
desastre      muerte •

**Negro** ⇒ el porvenir que nos espera:

*“that dark doom that rides.”* [H. James]

y en

Matisse

el matiz de la luz

ausencia de luz

negro      blanco

yin      yang


DESTIERRO A LA INTENSIDAD

**0 - 1**

**1 - 0**

opuestos y complementarios

*negro palmeral* : puro e inexistente : del vaso se refleja en violetazul

y en ambos extremos de la vida nuestro destino 



ANTONIO JOSÉ PONTE  
SIX POEMS

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SOMEWHAT IN THE STYLE OF ISHMAEL ∞

A cloud detached itself, the rhododendron bloomed.  
The manure steamed in its saintly halo.  
The rooster leapt, the blood as well,  
the tongue rebelled:  
let me drop my coin of milk inside you.

The wind passed by and spread  
the legs of grass apart.  
The final swell of summer rose.  
Let me drop my coin of milk inside you,  
call you she-dog above, call you skylark below.

REGARDING THE PLANET ∞

A fallen quill and the head  
is the abandoned nest.

A cloud on the skin, a shredded cirrus  
and three tattooed drops of rain.

Air blown at the hairs surrounding the nipple.  
The skin of another animal corroded by sweat.

And a pubic hair, a fanciful sketch,  
like a blade of grass between the lips.

## SONG ∞

I spent the whole summer listening to that record.  
To keep the feeling from disappearing  
I would listen to it once a day.  
When I got hungry I would go for a walk.

In its own way, the light sang that song,  
the ocean sang it, a bird  
spoke it.  
At one point I thought:  
all this is happening to me so that I will fall in love.

Then summer disappeared.  
The bird  
drier than the branch  
never opened its beak again.

## AUGURIES ∞

Amid the scattering of fruit my hands  
squeeze the nipples at their tips,  
recognize the animal under the table  
that can't imagine how much I want its entrails.

If I had been created under that sign  
that only benefits those of my blood,  
I wouldn't be here offering reverence  
amid fruit, flies, cups of tea.

You tell me  
"One city follows another.

A fish swims through many waters."  
I who am not disgusted by viscera,  
I who never play dirty open its body.  
I read in its liver tea leaves at the bottom of cups.  
Those leaves reveal a horse destined to step in its own dung,  
to smell its bellowing on the walls.

The horse comes and says  
"A bird sings on the eastern wall.  
The sun rises and mounts me.  
A bird sings on the western wall.  
The chill returns.  
A bird sings on the eastern wall.  
The sun mounts me.  
I hear a song from the opposite wall."

You don't know this scowling enemy.  
The August light does nothing but indulge you.  
I who was born in August don't feel so confident.  
"You must brush the leaves aside,"  
you say.  
"Wait.  
Unions and betrayals,  
baptisms  
and the usual waiting,  
the same old waiting."

We have become adept at drinking brown water,  
at sunning ourselves,  
at passing between bodies,  
at poking them in the side with a spoon.  
The birds that would herald your departure  
now fly at the edge of the sea,  
they wheel about,  
their celebration still above us  
like other birds I've seen sunning themselves in the afternoon.  
Other birds one Sunday  
equally sure they are telling us something.

## CITIES ∞

It was an unknown city  
awaiting winter  
(winter too turns out to be unpredictable,)  
in the city of winter  
and I was afraid.

It was not the distance I was crying over then  
nor the unrecalled face of my house  
but force of habit, how I propped myself up.  
I was anticipating a center, I crossed streets.  
What do we do with our lips  
but mangle that old song:  
where is the center,  
the seed I might lift up in my hands?

People passed.  
The road to the beauty of their faces was so long  
and I so slow to walk down it ...  
I had written that one city succeeds another  
but I found more than my memory could hold.  
It was an unknown city  
awaiting winter.  
I was afraid of wasting myself on towns that didn't exist,  
towns invented by the passing of trains.

## A SEAT IN THE RUINS ∞

Daybreaks poised in the air in nineteen hundred and eighty-eight  
when my distant viscera were hushed  
I was seized by the memory of the dead,  
memory of a growing vertical family.  
Where was my childhood going?  
Where were those who had promised the second crown:  
what desire does not pursue,  
what words barely attempt?  
Daybreaks when I wrote

“Must I write in verse  
to separate myself from other men?”  
(Lautréamont)

The wind from the madhouses was blowing.  
Where were those who had promised the second crown:  
what desire does not pursue,  
what words barely attempt?  
Must I separate myself from men to write in verse?  
Daybreaks poised in the air in nineteen hundred and eighty-eight  
with your head in my hands.  
It smelled like the forest, a bird cursed at us, it was the end of the earth.  
How many outings that would make me wiser,  
how much light, tree, water,  
what a more virtuous voice calls life,  
burning then for this understanding:  
how sad between my hands,  
like counterfeit coins I will not bite,  
the head of the one I loved. ☒

*Translated by Mark Schafer*

CURTIS WHITE

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FROM AMERICA'S MAGIC MOUNTAIN

AUTHOR'S NOTE ∞

America's Magic Mountain is a rewriting of early sections of Thomas Mann's famous novel. I've kept the name of the protagonist, Hans Castorp, because Hans' naivete and lack of self-knowledge suited my purposes. The spa, in this case, is not an up-scale tubercular sanitarium in the mountains, but an alcohol and drug rehabilitation center housed in abandoned fast-food buildings in among squat mounds of toxic coal trailings. This is only one of many ways in which my novel is far less subtle than Mann's. Nonetheless, peeping out here and there amidst our shared ruin, you may recognize yourself.



"Well, this is it," said Ricky, gesturing broadly, "what do you think?"

Hans thought he had never seen anything quite like it. The Elixir was simply a series of buildings lined up along the north side of a very narrow country road. A health facility, he had imagined, would be full of large shady trees and lots of softening landscape. There should be broad lawns on which families might picnic with the ailing. He expected such a place to appeal to the timeless calm of nature. He expected reassuring brick bungalows reminiscent of WPA-style social stability. But these buildings communicated something very different. They said: we have nothing in

common with each other. We are here because we are unwanted anywhere else in the world. Starting from the right, the east, there was a rusting Quonset hut that served as a meeting area and movie hall. (Hans had never seen one before except in some very old movies about World War Two. He could never look at Quonset huts without expecting prop-driven airplanes to come out of them.) Next there was what appeared to be an abandoned fast-food franchise. It was of indeterminate denomination; most of the corporate markings had been messily obliterated. Then there was a squat, brick bank building with the legend “Farmers Bank of Pontiac—1886” still boldly carved in the limestone above its door. Then a Victorian-era farm house, stripped of all detail and covered in dented aluminum siding. Old peeling white paint dangled from it like party decorations. A Spee-D-Lube, a 7-11 medical center, and then an abandoned Mr. Donut with all corporate markings still perfectly visible. Finally, a grain elevator into which crude windows had been cut, creating a very primitive-looking high-rise apartment complex.

Hans stood before this vision in awe. It looked at one moment familiar—it was a strip mall!—and at the next spookily strange—alien spacecraft had transported these here using powerful tractor beams! It was so much free-floating space junk. No one piece of junk had any relation to the next, let alone to the environment created by the mountains of coal trailings looming behind. These buildings seemed simply enormous, unmoored and dangerous.

It was at that moment that Hans noticed something else. It was a smell. The smell came on the wind. It was a plainly stinking wind. It colored everything he saw. Hans tried to figure what this wind smelled like since it didn’t smell like any wind he’d ever smelled before (although it can’t be said he’d smelled that many winds in his Downstate University dormitory). He finally concluded that the wind smelled like someone was boiling tennis balls.

“You’ll be staying in the Mr. Donut,” said Ricky, interrupting Hans’ first impressions. He pulled a flask from inside his jacket. “Cheers!” he offered, tipping the flask back and taking a measured swallow.

Hans didn’t know what presented the most immediate threat, the Mr. Donut, this unbelievable stinking or Ricky’s flask. All of them alarmed him. He turned back to the Mr. Donut. It seemed to loom before him, beckoning, winking, shifting its obscene pastry thighs. He considered what it would mean to submerge himself in this donut-ness. His panicky mantra again intruded: “How long is two weeks?”

Back to his cousin.

“Ricky, what in the world is that smell?”

Ricky looked at his cousin in surprise. "Good lord, don't tell me that you can still smell it."

"Smell what?"

"You said that you smelled something."

"Yes, but I don't know what it is."

"Well, what else could it be?"

"What are you thinking it could be?"

"Well, the Big Stinking, of course."

"I have no idea what that is."

"It was a mammoth disaster. A major Stinking Event of the first magnitude. A smell so bad it actually registered on the Richter scale. A shocking smell."

"Oh."

"But, it was so long ago. I assumed it was all gone. I guess that we're just used to it. It was reported at the time to be a very changeable smell. Most often it was likened to the smell of boiling tennis balls."

"That's amazing. That's just the idea that I had of it."

"Well, don't worry about it too much. It's not dangerous. It's just a smell. A lingering smell of a very long ago incident that we don't really like to remember."

"Why?"

"Because it smelled bad."

Hans concluded that he wouldn't get any further with this line of questioning. "And Ricky, don't think I didn't notice. What are you drinking there?" asked Hans.

"Cognac, old boy. VSOP."

"I meant *why* are you drinking? I meant, you are *drinking*. I thought you were sent here precisely because of your drinking." This let the cat out of his aunt's bag to a degree.

"Easy, Cousin," Ricky replied, replacing the cap on his flask with theatrical aplomb. "Two things: first, I don't know who told you this, my mother no doubt." He looked Hans dead in the eye. "My mother has no right to an opinion about my drinking. She has her own past and her own conduct to account for. I won't say any more on that subject. Second, in my opinion, drinking is involved but not constitutive in my condition. Necessary but not sufficient, as they say. My illness is not something that can be labeled so simply. Finally, for your own part, take the time to get to know the place before you start making judgements. This is not your world. Thank God. If I lived in your world, I'd feel like I'd placed my head in a fucking Band-aide box. And shut the lid! We have our own ways here."



Hans tried to keep up with Ricky's rapidly progressing assumptions.

"Well, I may not know much about this place yet, but it's very confusing, Ricky. And what do you mean 'in your opinion' your drinking is not constitutive? What about your doctor's opinion? What does that count for?"

Ricky spread one of his sly, knowing smiles between the two of them. "My doctor has recused himself from my case."

"Recused?"

"Yes. Conflict of interest, so to speak. But enough chatting. Let me show you your room."

They went through the Mr. Donut's front door as if it were Sunday morning and they wanted something glazed, then through the hinged gap in the counter where thousands of waitresses immemorial had passed before. Hans thought he could still smell the fat, and the burning coffee, and the cigarettes. There were, however, no actual donuts in the display case. Towels, toiletries and cleansers were stacked neatly in their place.

Passing through the swinging doors that once led to the kitchen, Hans found himself in a clean, well-appointed living space complete with a tiny alcove for preparing meals. It was even nicer than his dorm rooms. For the first time since stepping down out of the train, he felt the hope that a degree of comfort and security was not out of the question here.

Ricky stood at Hans' elbow frankly evaluating his reaction. "You're lucky to have this room, you know. I didn't think it would become available in time. It is the premier guestroom in the complex. You'll enjoy total privacy here. I'd feared you might have to take one of those uncomfortable little cells behind the tellers' booth in the old Farmer's Bank. Or in the grain elevator, good God!"

"I'm glad for that. But what happened to this room's last occupant? Not taken off in one of your sleds, I hope."

"In fact they used the station wagon since the weather was good. You might have seen it pull up to the luggage car as you got off the train. But you had other things on your mind, eh?"

"A fascinating woman, though. She and her sister, as teenagers, had become convinced, through some sort of elaborate juvenile fantasy, that the only way to ensure the further populating of the world was by having children through their own father. So they would intoxicate their father (and themselves while they were at it) and then, essentially, rape him. The oldest daughter died at seventeen. The father checks in and out of here like the coming and going of seasons. The second, younger daughter was

in here for years.”

“And did they in fact have children?”

Ricky reached again into his jacket for his flask. He took a hit. “Oh, one or two. You’ll see them. They’re here. No biggie.”

Hans thought he had learned as much about the previous occupant as he needed to know. For no good reason, he nervously opened a desk drawer, against which he had been leaning. There he saw a wad of Kleenex with a clot of hair wrapped within it, a pencil, and an open tube of lipstick on which it appeared something had been gnawing. He shut the drawer. “Well, this is really a very decent room. I think I can spend a couple of weeks here with great pleasure.”

“That’s the spirit. I’m glad you like it, old boy. As I say, its availability has a tragic side, but that is as it must be in this vale of tears, eh?” Ricky paused. “But I should tell you one more thing. The little boys who were the children to this woman have been coming to cry in the lobby area out front. In the days following their mother’s death, they would sit out there all day long. They made quite a racket. They’d cry until their cheeks chapped and stung from the salty tears, and then they’d rub their mother’s cold cream into each other’s face. They weren’t very subtle about it. The cream got mixed in with the tears, and they had no sense of how much cold cream was really needed. After a while, their faces looked like they’d been meringued.”

“That’s really sad.”

“Yes, I suppose it is, now that you mention it. But we also suspect that they were drinking from their mother’s stash of vodka.”

“No! The children?”

“At any rate, they probably won’t be back since their mother has been carted off. But they might return looking for the vodka.” Ricky now looked sternly at his cousin. “Now, old boy, if the children return you tell them this: ‘Your mother is dead. There is nothing for you here. I will not give you any juice. Go away.’”

Hans thought about this with a pained expression on his face. “Isn’t that sort of hard on them? They’re just children, I guess.”

Ricky pushed his face into his cousin’s. “Get this, Hans. It will take these kids exactly three days to drain you of your life if you make the mistake of sympathizing with them. Tell them to get the bloody hell fucking away from you. That’s all.”

“Well, maybe you’re right. The place is in good order now and I should try to keep it that way. Children are messy. Except that smell.”

“Another smell?”

“Yes, I smell something. It smells like...donuts!” Suddenly a strange,

unnatural hilarity got the better of him. He laughed out loud. He could not stop. He laughed so hard the tears came down his cheeks. He rocked with laughter. He put his hands to his face. He thought he could feel cold cream there. He mixed it up. He meringued it.

“You know, Cousin,” said Ricky, distanced from Hans’ mirth, “you may fit in here much better than I ever expected.”

Thus it was that Hans was introduced to the hole at the heart of him.

After Hans had been shown his room, Ricky led him back down the street, past the Farmer’s Bank of Pontiac, the Spee-D-Lube, etc., to the fast-food franchise of uncertain denomination. Hans felt, as anyone might, alien. But the gun that his cousin had shoved into his back pocket made his estrangement worse. The small revolver felt like it was a large knuckle of bone that had been removed from his body and reapplied to his exterior. It felt awkward in that way that something meant for the inside but applied to the outside must feel awkward.

As they entered, Hans tried to guess the original denomination of the establishment. “Ah, it is chicken, isn’t it? But not KFC. Right?”

“You’re on the mark as usual, Cousin.”

Hans beamed. “Oh, I know. It’s a Daffy’s. Daffy Duck’s Chicken. One of the smaller franchises. And dumber. Duck chicken! Went belly-up not long ago. I remember reading about it in a book on the psycho-social dynamics of the fast-food industry. Daffy’s deliberately sought out single-parent women for their work force on the theory that they would be more desperate and compliant than KFC and McDonald’s high-school kids. That was their corporate gambit in the time of the fast-food wars. They secretly supplied these women with amphetamines. Just to make sure. Boy, they felt great. Like they were nine-year-olds. And then one spring, these gaunt, strung-out women gathered in Washington, D.C., for the great Duck Walk for Fast-food Justice. Pathetic, really. Last straw for the corporation, too. Daffy’s declared bankruptcy *while* its five thousand employees were standing in the Great Mall, shivering before Lincoln’s Monument, skeletal from years of adrenal abuse, their hair pulled back in the oily buns fashionable among speed freaks. By the time they returned to their respective towns, the buildings themselves had either been leveled or pulled up and hauled away. And here’s one of them. It’s very interesting, Cousin. We stand inside history. And, oh look!, there’s a silhouette of Daffy himself.” He pointed to a window where adhesive had etched the ghost of Daffy Duck into the glass.

Ricky nodded vaguely.

“Say,” Hans considered, “we’re not going to have to eat chicken all the time, are we?”

“Truthfully, Hans, it’s not always clear to me what the food here ‘is.’ But we like it. It is enough for us.” Ricky nodded proudly.

Like most fast-food franchises of the 20th century, this building was gaudily furnished. It was lit by long, exposed fluorescent tubes that hung from recesses above the cheap acoustic ceiling tiles. A large number of tiles were missing, exposing the mechanics of the building. The orange and red tables and chairs were all faded and chipped plastic.

Ricky commented that this was often a happy spot where the premium American lager flowed and the conversation was lively. “We have a sense of family here, Cousin. We’re family of choice.”

This sounded very pleasant to Hans. And he was getting hungry. A good sign. He spread several paper napkins in his lap. Suddenly, with a rush of tumultuous screaming and laughter, a crowd of children ran out from the kitchen area with warm paper bags that they deposited on the table. Just as quickly, with just as many loud screams and giggles, they disappeared back behind the swinging kitchen doors.

“What did we order?” asked Hans, his mood lifting as he opened one of the toasty bags.

Ricky smirked, a little condescendingly. A lock of brownish-blond hair fell across his brow. He looked stunningly northern. “As you know, Cousin, we didn’t order anything. We’re getting what we get.” He frowned. “Look,” he said with irritation, “you’re being granted a generosity here. You don’t see any other’s enjoying this early meal, do you?”

Hans blushed and stammered, horrified that he may have seemed ungrateful. “I’m sorry. I don’t mean to seem arrogant. I’ll happily eat whatever I’m served.”

Hans then opened one of the bags, a Burger King bag, and peered inside. It was full of small plastic containers of ketchup, mustard and mayonnaise, a few of them burst, which the kitchen urchins had apparently microwaved and for no short period.

“Ricky, this bag is full of hot condiments.”

Ricky sighed and looked toward the ceiling. It was as if he knew that yet another not-refusable obligation was about to be his. A textbook concept came to Hans: the so-called “Misery of Mastery.” He’d aced that class. “Social Construction and Imposition of Mastery in American Industry.” Not simple stuff either. Very advanced management theory. For the first time it occurred to Hans that Ricky—forceful and determined though he might seem—was under a lot of stress. Like the over-burdened

CEOs he had studied, Ricky was a force of gravity holding a whole world together, but it was a world whose most natural desire was to fly apart. Hans wanted to sympathize, but he wanted to sympathize from a safe distance.

Ricky opened another of the bags, this one with a Jack-in-the-Box logo, and looked inside. French fry bags full of pickle chips char-broiled to a fineness. "I think," he surmised, "that we may have a degree of childish resentment working here. I suppose that they don't like having to feed people at the 'wrong time.' I'll take care of it." He gathered up the bags and strode back toward the kitchen.

Hans feared that the children would be punished for their prank. He felt a little guilty about this since, as he'd already learned, The Elixir was hardly an ideal environment for children. He braced himself for unpleasant shouting or a loud banging. Maybe a slap. But he heard nothing. After what was perhaps ten minutes of silence, he did at last hear a muffled voice growing steadily louder, beginning at first as a chilling moan, and peaking finally in a persistent complaint. "Ow-oweee!"

A few minutes later, Ricky returned with two Styrofoam plates heaped with warm food. The plate Ricky placed before Hans contained three chicken nugget type things, the bottom half of a hamburger bun, a dozen or so small dark French fries (someone had obviously tried to re-heat already cooked French fries by placing them back in the fry vat), some of the steaming pickles from Ricky's earlier bag, some shredded lettuce airily here and there, and finally somewhere deep beneath it all a sort of bedrock of what appeared to be a pancake. There was also a small carton of milk that Ricky produced from his coat pocket. It was warm, already opened, and maybe a little more than half-full.

Hans looked up from his meal in amazement.

Ricky returned his look with one of irritation. "That's what I could find." Pause. "It's not always like this." Pause. "Okay you don't want this shit, you don't have to eat it."

Reaching across the table, Ricky grabbed the plates violently, French fries and chicken nuggets spilling onto the floor, and carried them over to an already overflowing trash bin. He stuffed the plates in, and about half of the food fell to the floor. He then walked back to the kitchen—this time the children really did scream—but returned quickly with a six-pack of beer. He was obviously finding it difficult to control himself. "Fucking babies," he concluded. Hans wondered if he were included in this judgement. He popped a can of the beer and drained half of the first one in a single draught. "Don't be shy, Cousin, help yourself."

Hans didn't want a beer, and didn't like alcohol, but he also didn't know how

to say no to his cousin. Ricky stared at his mute cousin, polished off his first beer, and said, "Okay, then, Cousin Emissary. You-who-will-do-my-mommy's-bidding. You-who-will-do-her-bidding-by-doing-nothing-other-than-gawk-with-a-half-baked-expression-on-your-face, as if you'd never seen a person drink a beer before. Why don't you just go back to your room? The real dinner is only a few hours off." He smiled grimly. "Then you can eat something more substantial."

"Okay," agreed Hans, "I'll see you later."

Hans stood. He meant to turn, walk away, and return to his quiet quarters. Inexplicably, he saw himself reach for one of the beers, tug it with difficulty from its polystyrene ring, open it and take a long drink. Another. A curious restlessness, at once pleasurable and annoying, overtook his limbs. It felt like energy, but not energy he was in control of. He tried to say something, but his words fell all over each other. So he tried to gesture but the gesture seemed magically to acquire significance not even he could imagine. So, he shrugged his shoulders.

His cousin stared at him stonily. Hans choked his can of beer. Ricky decided to speak.

"Have you ever had this experience, Cousin? You're crossing a street, preoccupied with some petty matter. You bounced a check, or yet another uncle died somewhere. Something like that. A car is coming. You wait for it to pass. It passes at a velocity that makes it plenty clear that it is indifferent to your health. You begin to cross in its just vacated path. Halfway through, it occurs to you with a real jolt, 'Did I remember to let the car pass?' You look up in panic. Then you ask yourself a related but different question, how can I be sure I would see the car even if it were there? Crossing a busy street is not a good time for a meditation on how our sense perception deceives us, Cousin. Well, funny though it may seem to you (and it does have its comic side), this sort of experience is a constant state of Mind here at the Elixir. Having a cup of tea in that psychic landscape is not so restful, old boy. That's where these come in handy." He patted what remained of his six-pack as if it were the sturdy head of a Labrador. "You know, some people, even some people in that other world you call home, understand that each year they pass over the date of their eventual death. On one day each year you are stepping on your own grave without knowing it. Does your little dormitory head understand this? Here at The Elixir, though, this understanding is so well established that merely waking up in the morning feels like playing Russian Roulette." He looked at Hans through narrowed eyes upon which nothing was lost. "Say, Cousin, have you ever considered the uncertainty of the hour of your own death?"

Ricky waited only a moment for Hans' response before concluding, "Yes, we sit here and laugh, but this place is not funny. It's not funny at all, Cousin."

Hans was bewildered by his cousin's talk, but he was most bewildered by Ricky's allusion to laughter, of which there had been exactly none.

"But we persevere. We keep moving ahead." Ricky took a meditative swallow from his beer. "It's the good fight, isn't it, Cousin?"

Hans had no idea what he was talking about. So he set his beer on the table, still nearly full in spite of his attempts at swallowing, and walked without a word of goodbye out of the fast-food restaurant.

He was by himself for the first time. The painful strangeness of this place pressed him. Here again was the strip mall of displaced space junk. And there was that stinking wind again. This time, though, it wasn't boiling tennis balls. It smelled now more like plastic beach thongs being simmered in chicken fat.

A short distance from the restaurant, he saw a little boy sitting on a blue, plastic milk crate. He was very unhappy about something. His little face was buried in his hands. For a moment Hans wondered, a little weirdly, if this child weren't somehow related to Ricky's story about walking in front of passing cars. He wondered if perhaps this child might not be something dangerous that he should allow to pass by. The best response might be to walk quickly on pretending not to notice him. But, then, Hans had already noticed. He couldn't deny it. He was the kind of person who noticed things. Like the back of the boy's shirt. There were four streaks of drying blood on this boy's white shirt, as if someone had wiped fingers down his back. The boy looked up at the sound of Hans' footsteps, and Hans saw that it was one of the children who had "served" him.

"What's the matter, little fellow?" asked Hans, oddly self-conscious of his gesture. "Why are you crying?"

The boy wiped at his snotty face with the back of his pudgy hand and complained, "Mister Ricky hurt me."

Hans was now bent down beside the boy, talking to him "at his own level." He indulged this gesture of concern. "Oh well, you know, he was just a little upset that you played a trick on us."

"Oh big deal!" he cried out. "Big deal! Why was giving you hot ketchup and stuff so bad? We thought it was funny."

"Well, I'm new here, you know, and he was probably hoping to make a good impression. I'm sure he didn't mean to hurt you."

"No, he hurt me bad," the boy whined, outraged at Hans skepticism, stretching

the words out as children who imagine great injury do.

Hans frowned. "Okay, tell me where it hurts."

"He hurt my bottom."

"Your bottom. You mean he spanked you."

"I'm bleeding for crissakes!" the boy screamed.

Hans thought again of the bloody marks on his little back.

"What's your name, little fellow?"

"Teddy. And I'm not your little fellow, whatever that is. Where are you supposed to be from? You talk funny." He buried his face in his crossed arms.

"Teddy. Nice to meet you. I'm Hans."

Teddy looked up. "And you got a funny name too. What kinda name is that? Hans. Like hands?"

"It's a regular name, I think."

"You gotta be kiddin'. That's a stupid name. I sure never heard it before."

"Well, I'm glad to meet you." He extended his hand.

"Sure. Okay. Me too," replied Teddy. He did not extend his own hand.

"Tell me, Teddy, where do you live?"

"Well, I used to stay in the Mr. Donut with my mommy, but she's dead. They put her on the tractor."

Guilt rinsed over Hans. But something in him resisted the guilt. And why not? It wasn't his idea to throw out the orphans to make room for him. What was he supposed to do? Sleep in a field for two weeks? Perhaps it was these thoughts that led him to try to correct what he thought was a factual error in Teddy's comment. "You mean, I think, that they put her in a station wagon. I believe that they only use the tractor and sled in heavy winter. Right? When the snow tornadoes come through?"

Teddy looked at Hans as if he were an idiot and a cruel idiot at that.

"What station wagon, mister? They took my mommy on the regular tractor. The one that comes through every day. She's my mommy, I saw it, and I know." He stood up from his milk crate as if to emphasize his point.

"I'm sorry. Calm down. Perhaps I'm mistaken."

"I'll say you are. You ought to know what you're talking about before you start talking."

Hans tried to return to a caring posture. "So where do you stay now?"

"They let me in the restaurant to work for as many hours as I like. Except when I'm bad like today when I gave you the bag of hot condominiums or whatever you call them. Then I have to go outside. But since I've been bad, I deserve it."



Hans sensed something very sad in this admission. He didn't know quite how to put it. "Well, Teddy, I don't know much about it, but I think that you have a right to be sad. Not having a home is very sad." Hans recognized his words before they were even out of his mouth. It was his instructor in Dysfunctional Family Counseling I. The hands on stuff. The daily reflections framed on the wall. The therapeutic aromas. Professor Thomas Bardo. His whole point seemed to be that it was great to think that everyone had a right to be sad. Bardo—a guy with a ponytail and open-neck, organic, cotton Deva shirt—seemed to positively glory in everyone's sadness.

But Teddy wasn't buying it. He looked at Hans with a startling clarity. "Who said anything about being sad?" He scowled. "Oh, God. You're not one of those, are you?"

"One of what?"

"One of those 'bleeding hearts' that Reverend Boyle tells us about."

Hans was not a greatly experienced young man. He was born and stuck in a vinyl box, and before he was conscious he was put in school, and he stayed there until school spit him back out. He had studied something called "industrial psychology," a subject in which his confidence and capacity was truly irritating. But that didn't mean he knew anything about what Teddy called "bleeding hearts."


Teddy stretched to his full chubby length to make his next point. "The things you hear about the homeless"—and Hans had in truth heard next to nothing about the homeless—"are lies. The newspapers say that corporations don't care about people and that's why they are living on the street. Ha!" Teddy bounced his little belly and stood high on his sturdy legs. Already Hans backed away from the pudgy prodigy. "They're living on the street for one reason: they're stupid! They make stupid choices like...choosing to live on the street!"

Teddy laughed and spun around, the blood on the back of his shirt flashing. He crowed in the exuberance of his mastery of this knowledge.

"The homeless are the result of a lack of personal responsibility and a generation-long decline in respect for the traditional American values of hard work! As if you'd know anything about hard work."

Hans was walking rapidly away from the boy. But Teddy wasn't done. He gave chase. "You're not getting away so easy as that, Mr. Sensitive-Soul-Who-Does-Nothing-to-Solve-the-Problem. You feel 'sorry' for me? Does that help you to 'feel good'? Why don't you take responsibility? Are you inviting me to share your Mr. Donut bed tonight?" Teddy gave a lewd wink that Hans just saw looking back over his shoulder. "I think you would keep a little boy warm, eh? Not so warm as my

mommy used to keep me, but warm enough. And why don't you get a job? How come you're not working? This some sort of travel holiday hot-spot for you? Hey, come back here! What's up? I'll chew on your leg!"

Hans had managed to run a little way ahead. He could just hear Teddy's last warning. "I'll be watching you now, Mr. Liberal. We know what to do with your type around here." 

SOLEIDA RÍOS  
FROM DIRTY TEXT

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I

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Must I enter a castle for no other reason than that I see before me its stone walls and stairs, that I smell the scent (presentiment) of age, its heavy suffocating dankness? Even if in fact there are no bridge, moat, tower, or outworks?

I take the step which situates me irrevocably within the Place, the Site. Only later will I remember that I don't know how to move. It's happened once before. Once before. I stagger, or better, walk in circles. I trace long, fat S's. Or I question.

I ask myself whether the women I see at the far end of the great hall, etched into the stone wall like postcards or pretty miniatures, are real. Long, voluminous medieval gowns. Lush reds and blues. Women out of a romance of courtly love. They detach themselves from the stone wall to attend to some business or other that I don't understand. The one we call The Chicken emerges from the crowd of women—Walter L's wife (W.L., department head, that Walter). Decked out as usual, she approaches, dragging the train of her blue gown behind her, her long hair in yellow braids.

The Chicken: Soledad? You're here?

I answer: That's right.

The Chicken: Where's Mario?

I answer: There.

The Chicken: Ah!

Oddly, even for me, without a moment's hesitation and apropos of nothing, I respond, "no, we don't know how to live." (A *we* without limits. The *no* absolute, lapidary. Present indicative? Removing that lapidary *no* might dissipate the terrible chill of the phrase, but that would implicate it instead in *The Lie* or *The Joke*.) I offer my own example; I hear myself say, "if they were to release me suddenly in whatever Country, as they did Mario, could I survive? Would I know how to live?"

The Chicken: Ah!

"The important thing was—is—that leading such regimented lives we haven't learned how to live. We haven't learned it," I say (we? who? the strangers in the castle? The medieval women? All of us? All? Which?), "as individuals." I keep going—I can't stop myself: "We don't know how to solve the problems of our own lives. Without Divine Intervention. Without A Decision From Above."

The Chicken (she wipes her nose with a handkerchief embroidered with delicate gold and silver threads): That's right.

"But Mario does," I tell her. "He's been able to make his own way. He's doing well in Buenos Aires." And I tell her what I know about Mario's life in Buenos Aires. Everything I remember. The Chicken nods, "That's right."

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## II

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(INTERLUDE)

Six or seven stairs. The same dark stone as the wall. I descend. I look around. A small chamber. A scene is being performed for the camera. Or for some other reason. Two men. A woman. A sofa. A petite table, low to the ground. The woman, a girl, really, is one of those dressed in medieval clothing. She stands, facing the men from a safe distance, the toe of her slipper balanced on the table's edge. I can see the men's backs. Of course I descend the stairs.

The man sitting on the right side of the sofa seems familiar. As I approach the

bottom of the stairs I rest my weight on his back, supporting myself with my hand. Or so it seems. And when I realize that I don't know him at all, I press down still harder. Impertinent gesture. I force this unknown man—the one on the right, on the sofa—to bend beneath my weight. With total impunity. Or perhaps I'm weightless, and that's why he doesn't react. I finish my descent and take a few steps forward.

The medieval girl begins to writhe. It's as though she were about to float. She stirs (they drape her in diaphanous veils) displays her body (swathed to the ankles in skin-tight bright green) and offers herself. The man on the right, the one I'd used for support, does his part, assists her. He or the table support her. With a lurch, she rises, her body describing an acute angle to the floor. An arm moves, a hand moves. She is quivering, vibrating, she tenses her twisted arm and hand, and the man bends over, bites her pelvis, licks at her, swallows, bites again, swallows, lingers at the seam, the deep pleat of her bright green garment (now darkened), swallows, bends still further, then thrusts his jaws into her, holding her aloft. Her body, which moments before had been shaking violently, relaxes, subsides into a regular beat. Tick tock tick tock. Like a clock, a heart, a liver. Held aloft by the man's mouth.

The climax. What they were seeking. I feel an extraordinary excitement. It lifts me off the ground. I tell this to Teresa Lavandero while we're walking down the stone hallways looking for a way out of the Site, the Place. I say to her, "There are men with whom I've never experienced that much excitement." Enormous. Astonishing.

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### III

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Solid walls. Stone. Openings that surely lead nowhere. Sara Esquivel busies herself in the kitchen. She drags the train of her blue gown behind her. The delicate ribbons in her silver-blue coif flutter nervously. While she works we are engaged in a long conversation. She has been talking about a mirror, an inscription on a mirror. All of a sudden I exclaim, "what a great dream I had." (But they feel like Sara's words.) And I talk about Mario. I tell her everything I remember about his life in Buenos Aires.

"He was able to...He knew how to..."

"That's right," she agrees.

Then I repeat in minute detail my conversation with The Chicken. But we're still embroiled in The Same Conversation. I underline, emphasize, exaggerate the

meaning of my words. I say "...and this fear of foreigners, as though we weren't *lost*."

I actually say it: *lost*. But it's my second choice, my salvation. The first one—the one I would have preferred—sticks in my throat. I can no longer remember what it was. That word, with all its heft, its specificity, its volume—I can't remember it—it becomes a bolus of filthy rags, a wad of stuff stuck between my teeth. It won't come out. I can't pronounce it. I repeat "...as though we weren't *lost*." The word *lost* bursts forth, is pushed out, falls oddly into The Conversation. Sara Esquivel doesn't notice, isn't even aware of my problem, the mess I've fallen into merely because of the denial (my denial?) of the word for which I have substituted *lost*. Is that why she walks to the widest opening in the stone wall, glances out, turns to me again and says:

"I knew it! I knew it all along! I didn't want to tell you...(and then, one after another: seriousness, a mysterious air, and a series of expressions synthesized from or subsumed beneath her habitual grimace and the look of a frightened animal. It stops then, or rather, diminishes...) ...It was his request..."

It was *his* request! *His* request! This Trifle is suddenly less amusing. It creates The Kingdom of Confusion. His! Whose? What's he asking? When?

With these questions I return abruptly to Reality. Therefore:

Sara Esquivel recedes into the distance. She is etched into the stone wall. A postcard, a pretty miniature. Big hair. Blue. The curl of the little finger of her right hand unmasks her.

The medieval girl approaches the audience (the Void), bows.

The man I had leaned upon, the man on the right, The Detonator of Excitement (painter, photographer, cinéaste) steps forward, nods.

The other man on the sofa waves without rising.

Gracefully The Chicken holds the train of her blue gown, smiles (odd teeth, stunted, yellow), and wags her head.

Mario is Away, won't be appearing.

Teresa Lavandero peers into the Void, mumbles "'dirty texts,' where will it end?"

I come forward I sneeze I have said it presentiment I sneeze the old smell that suffocates me I sneeze. ☒

*Translated by Mark Weiss*

JORGE GUITART

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CINCO POEMAS & THE BABY WEARS THE MASK OF  
MYSTERIOUS CLOSENESS

COMER DE CANTINA ∞

Algunos serían pesos bajo colores de abismos  
Un niño ciencia no nació  
La catarata del hipopótamo ya no es la pregunta

El duelo del vaso y de las llamas:  
Largas llamadas de pintar picos  
Tetas y cuellos  
Y es congruente con la lepra

Brillo del balde y del 'no en balde'  
Porque lo dijo acaso el que duerme  
A quien no vela el pertinente

Y la mujer alzada y el hombre proferido  
Es la arruga la que muestra el órgano

La cueva exacta entre las piernas  
Salpicó al convulso

Y como si aflorar fuera perentorio  
Las uñas destinadas a vivir

Es malo aquí  
La tierra funciona de tienda

Con destino al instante  
El cuerpo de pecho  
La espuma de luto  
Para exhalar estoy yo

Oleadas de posología  
Porque algo explotó  
Y los vestidos de cerámica  
Obligaron a tener dientes

Se quiebra el raudo  
Y la luz es la corteza  
La lámina de ex pájaro casi no late  
Pero suelta el ópalo cuando te desvistas.

DESDE EL SUR ∞

Yo fui el avatar de mí ayer y abro ahora una lata de conservas.  
El querer verdadero existe en las adivinanzas de los muertos  
y no en la devoción a marías vestidas tan distintas.

Miren además cómo los calores inundantes no disuelven las grasas  
de las arterias de las ferias, ni del opresor que se nos sienta al lado  
en días obligatorios de graves consecuencias.

Las fieras buenas tienen sus propias arterias  
pero los niños no pueden utilizarlas  
para contrarrestar la azulidad de las venas como quisieran.

Por eso hay causas y por eso llueve tan rápidamente  
dentro de los riñones de los monstruos.  
Se agitan los remos pero las aguas quedan plurales y no hacen caso.

Ahora con voz que quisiera ahogar las prebendas:  
ahí sí (en unas páginas) significa que la chulería



no ha sobrepasado su texto. Esa viga sexual, ¿no se quedó tiesa?

El norte, el polo favorecido, es un sagrario de nieve.  
Las abejas encintas pueden apuntalar uno de los posibles firmamentos  
Pero en estas almejas no cabe un ángel más.

Pero es porque no quiere el dueño de la luna del espejo  
Entonces Aurorita nos guarda los dientes de leche  
para que los círculos concéntricos de sus enanos pechos

vuelvan a sumergirse buscando regalos de otros.  
El chillido del puerco no ha cesado  
ni el vozarrón del puerco humano que casi lo ha liquidado.

Lo dice el libro de hilos de oro: Al lobo que pulula por las repisas  
hay que verlo con el rey niebla para que el olmo no se canse de ser peral  
en las hondonadas del sentido que son muy superficiales

cuando rotan los brazos y caen sin cerebros los golpes.  
Esta caja no cierra a la salida de la brisa, y ya no saluda la que nos lamía.  
¿Cómo seguirán sus toronjas de bronce?

Ahora se tatúa a la memoria buscando lástima,  
pero la cochinilla dispara caca  
y un gnomo se ha hecho daño en sus ojos de piedra.

## EL TESORO DE LA SENECTUD ∞

Habiendo escudriñado la realidad, decidí unirme a ella bañándome, tocando a  
alguien, que resulté ser yo mismo.

Todo se extiende pero no todo se contrae. O es al revés, creo ahora, por no haber  
esa malla invisible, tan pregonada, sobre los jardines. De los jardineros no hablaré  
por no saber de qué gozan cuidando el crecimiento o quién les paga.

¿Cómo puedo arreglarme, es decir, repararme, si no estoy roto, y sigo mirando para  
afuera por ser de dentro?

Yo sé que llegaré a tu boca y me pronunciarás, pues sé que el alma lucha con el cuerpo y éste gana. Y es lucha libre pero no es pala. No es un cuento. Es de entes que se desgracian juntos.

En las historias permitidas, ¿cómo puede este dedo crear una excitación insospechable? Te diré que el diamante de las estrellas es de miedo. Pero no le tengas miedo al miedo. Ténselo al terror.

Hay batido de sangre para el vampiro inocente, que en su cueva crea guano. Mas en cambio, si te haces un ovillo, por ejemplo cuando te ametrallan, pensarán que no eres tremenda interrogante sino cosa de enanos para ser borrada.

El grillo destapa su música, que es una prenda demencial, dicen los cautivos por el estilo de nosotros, de ojos turbios y agitados.

Ahora sí que arriba el devenir a costas que no son nuestras y se va yendo, sin haber tenido el tejado que subir a esperar la lluvia. ¿Y las explosiones? Mal. Son de padres, porque alguien tuvo que tenerlos y fomentar desórdenes, externos e internos.

## NUEVAS ACRECIONES ∞

Mira que has estado veces con los éticos y nunca te hacen el favor completo. Yo no busco a nadie que pueda sacarme de mi nave de tungsteno.

Después de un análisis ebrio de la cuestión pareció el palmar de una tristeza narrable, aunque también insoportable por rural y opaca.

¿No quisieras usar lo que te queda de cordura para un alegato cuando en la factoría ha entrado un flujo de esclavos y ha salido otro?

Resquebrájase el cielo con tanta prédica y se extiende fractal la desgracia. La mente se anuncia con arcos reflejos: no sale oro y hierro ningún cortejo.

Y la amenaza de la materia cobra forma de padre o guardián. Nos corrompen según las órbitas de sus destinos.

El caballo niño se alza inmediatamente cuando hay vidrios niños que se rompen inmediatamente.

Pesó instanciarnos en el territorio de las bofetadas.  
Y fue terrible haber tenido que cortar el 'japi': haber tenido que 'darle tijera'.

Los sesos no se devanan a sí mismos. Si acaso se desparraman  
Como las estrellas cuando son avellanas.

Pesarosa es la infantilidad  
de los pájaros que no vuelan.

El día es un pantano lleno de secuencias.  
Empero vengo de parte de mis partes pudendas para decirte que soy un todo.

Los padres abren para los niños valles de lágrimas.  
La parte de la rueda que descansaba debe bajar a crear fricción.

No es en el cielo donde una oscura presencia vive en la nieve.  
Las ventanas están de reclusas en nuestras categorías.

Ya vienen las buenas noticias de las escrituras  
a darles cuerda a quienes no nos convienen.

Si tienes las ropas empapadas no te las quites hasta que no sepa qué eres.  
Es imposible derrotar la inexplicable reputación de la realidad.

Soleado patio policíaco: si hay un transformador que no funciona  
pero hay personas coquetonas, eso lo hace paradisíaco.

Se esfumará mi señal sin haber probado que lo sagrado de las montañas  
les viene por su densidad y su peso.

No es un alivio pensar que mi ridiculez es efectiva contra el 'paso' del tiempo.  
Mas no de mí es el robot que vive en el edificio embrujado de mi alma.

La tierra yace a la orilla de los pies.  
No quiero probar que ningún patio nos recuerda.

No me han dado lo que me toca y no me han dado en verdad  
Nada de lo que he tocado.

Hemos llegado para irnos. Aumenta la disminución.  
Sépalos el sépalos: soy pétalo. Pero dice el sépalos: Un pétalo más es un pétalo menos.

Corren las sombras y las fuentes de su opacidad  
Bajan juntas al pavimento donde se estrellan.

Nada oscurece más nuestros deseos que lo transparente.  
No te preocupes de catalogar las secreciones de mi voluntad.

## YECTILES ∞

Sigue lo del se mira y no se toca  
Hasta que te cueste trabajo.

Los nombres se adhieren a las cosas.  
mi héroe es un círculo de tiza  
aunque lo rodeen chabacanerías.  
así es un orbe y hay un dios  
que sabe que es el que es  
y el que debe sernos  
no una fantasía ambulatoria

sereno alguien pero corruptible.  
este momento infantil  
tiene momentos inevitables de vidrio  
quiero infantilizar todo  
para que me dejes acercarme.

te escribo desde mi frente:  
en una película hay una película  
de suciedad dejada por los hechos  
como si estuviéramos pegados  
en un estanque comercial.

la rebelión del pájaro califica más tarde  
como una trayectoria cualquiera  
puse un punto y aparte en el aire de la ventana.  
No hablé de mí conmigo mismo por ser

de otra clase de desconocidos.

son huesos regalos de poco valor.  
hay techos hechos de agua.  
que piense por nosotros un renacuajo  
que no quiera ser rana.  
No tengas el ánimo sideral esperado.

hablé de tumbarme y el verbo se apoderó de las neuronas que le hacían falta.  
cómo llevar la vocación de otro a la inestabilidad.  
¿de que quieres que me deje si no he triunfado?

## THE BABY WEARS THE MASK OF MYSTERIOUS CLOSENESS ∞

She has grown fond of suavity. She hears large-scale pedantic dialogue and forgives no one. The ambience is ridiculous. There is trouble in the inner colonies...  
(I stole the plot from a wise crustacean and a widow scorpion.)  
There is a dignified shaman who is unknown as a soprano and a sinister right-handed assistant who keeps elucubration to a minimum. Nakedness grows convincingly. Beauty turns out to be a bit ugly. There is the moisture of consciousness trying to escape. There is a messiah that gets derailed and a rodent that ends up being scarred and bruised by a gimmicky feline. Someone is of their mother's volcano but regrets the attention to its debris.

It's hard to live between foreground and background lacking a philosophy to speak to hanging plants. Eventually everyone behaves like a cobra or a python. Before I was aestheticized, I was inexplicably honest. This is my reason to be dismal and baroque: shallowness grows silently after each aftermath. If these golden halos could stop maculation, we would be in business. ☒

KASS FLEISHER  
THREE SOMEBODIES

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1. She had not been ill. She wanted to control her destiny. She felt her life was a journey that had concluded. But as this is not her choice to make she must justify the right margins. Tag. You're it. I put your declarations adjacent to. You pilgrim. She trekked across the page where she found *arse poetica*. To what extent is she the author of her work?

2. I was walking down the street with a buddy of mine and we came upon this child of gawd, selling pieces of paper. We saw that the papers were hers. I gave him fifty bucks to buy the manuscripts. Paper for paper. Where the hell did you get these? Who are *you* to dispose of fraud cheat swindle bilk gull stab someone in the back—peekaboo, we see you. We apprehend matters beyond ordinary perception. It's clear: we voyance your voyage.

3. Dear Clerk of the 10th District Court. A white woman writes this love letter to get him off. Just between justice. You are the maintenance or administration thereof. Truth fact reason. Alone in a black cell he writes red. From the sound of the drums he has learned: there is no rhythm until there is silence. To what extent is *his* work unwilling improvisation?

4. Half-betrayed, she sentences rage. Was the design so atrocious? He was not without some hope of awakening her to a sense of some hope. Read the poems, he said. Those poets, they don't finish their—you want me to teach you, I know you do. Let me break your lines. Say no to, give the thumbs down to, put down, spurn rebuff metaphorize. Did insanity inscribe her poems?

5. I inhale. Surrounded by acrylic. Renaissance, anyone? An expanding universe is satiny-sugar, accelerating upon you. I love that you have picked me up. I touch your book. Marriage: A Sentence. Tansy buttons, tansy. Her study of the anthologies reveals that women are allotted fifty percent fewer pages. She purports to poetize, that is when she is capable of sitting at her desk. I can't work, she says. I can't write. I can't.

6. Things overlap in space and are hidden. Her brother had come to put her life away. My how a seer lets shit pile up. Fucking shee-it piled higher than a fucking pile of store. Pile of mound. Pile of stack. Quoth she, piling on, on top of the synonyms. The nobody thrives now in her Withim Period, also called the Post-Notwithim Period. Seeing red, she thinks, You just cain't shoot 'em.

7. It rises from high in the belly. Under the diaphragm. When it gets real bad she feels it in her molars. She lets her eyes backstroke for just a minute—but there's no crying in baseball. He will have his gums cut again, any year now. It's just a fucking matter of time. I would fix the gap in my fucking teeth but it's just a minor fucking matter of a little fucking currency. So fuck you and your easy way outs.

8. She needed, once and for all, to create a woman as independent and outrageous as she. Female adventurers concern themselves with the quest plot, but seek only Other. You are my hero. No, you. No, YOU. YOOOUUUU. See the tales of the horror of love. Space, not capacity; pause, not cessation—she was abstracted by nerves long pressed upon. With something that used to be longing, she unzips his sacrifice fly.

1. She had promised to do it when she was young. She wrote about it. But the unforeseen pleasures of the years of aftermost, the last gift of time and space. Each day for now, for now writing a woman's lie. Blame her for nothing, condemn not a modality for—shall we say it—love. Yes, love, motherfucker, the *usual* state of affairs. The way it is. The way things go. Lift up your heads.

2. On the street, in the alley, we found a pyre of boxes. What her family didn't know about her was funereal. Packed. Packed. You couldn't have squeezed a goddamn sardine in there if you'd—well. Trappings. I plan my day, which is how I know it will end. Was she glad to have it turned off? Did you know that the word bitch is listed in the Oxford thesaurus? Write across from blame. Fucking shrew vixen virago harpy she-devil cocksuckers. Who made this shit up again? It's whack.

3. To Whom It May Concern: his teeth float in the back of his throat. Two consecutive life sentences, two contiguous lives. Significantly longer than the time at which a prisoner with a good record would normally have been blah blah blah

parole blah blah blah regulations existing both at the time of the offense as well as the current regulation. Regulate this, asshole. Regulate the clock. Out. Out of view. Out of date. Outlying. Outmoded. Outer banked.

4. Biographies are dead fictions, constructed by living fictions. Books. Papers. With her own hand. Rage hangs over language until breaststroking eyes ball the novel. It's a must-win situation. I let the words come to me. I can't hunt them down like socialization. I can't stalk the woods for verbalization. Can't field the stream for edification. Twilight had added its gloom to that of the rocks before the travelers had distinguished the town in which they meant to pass the night. Dread all full up.

5. They said she would call in the blackest hours. I see words in the air, on other people's foreheads in CAPITALS or *italics*. COUNTDOWN. COUNTDOWN. Forecasting horror. They will not let him out. They do not know who did it. They did not see it. They admit this. She taught us Gertrude. Pardon, was that shrew, or shrewd? I did not hear you quite right. Quite. The first official on the scene was a white woman. What the fuck was *she* doing there?

6. We are to write letters. There will be no home stretch. Mr. XY did it. I ask everywhere but no one knows how she achieved it. By her own hand. Can you see yourself reflected in the seasons? They thought he was crazy. They THUMBED through her *books* like those value coupons and set them aside, as any wealthy family would. I perceive what you meant. I understand you wish to penetrate my throat. There is nothing in the thesaurus under prick of course.

7. The manuscripts are blowing in the bins. I think so much about teaching because, well, the drugs help. Everyone is taking them. Breakfast, two-thirty, nine-thirty. And this is existence. Please, it frightens me when you call in the middle of the night. It rises from high in the belly and yawns against the maw. I won't have you using that horrible language in my absence. You understand, right, that a nobody is writing this.

8. All of my women friends sleep alone. Well, the light brown one doesn't. A husband yes, they all have husbands, but what is a husband in the face of five days of bleeding. He wrote her a note, called her a soul sista, even though she is whiter than gawd. Hallelujah. Pale wan ashen. The official white woman—he fucked her, and he hated her. I map the exhalation in vermilion and cardinal. I can't sit here. I can't. It rises from

1. Identity is grounded in the relation to the chosen other. There is a wholly different voice in the letters on the one hand and the autobiographical narratives on



the other. Not inspiration, dummy. She clung to her absent friend's garb, a sacred relique of her favorite recluse. Seeing. Women are well beyond youth when they begin to create another story. An Other. Store. Your love of narrative, you will forgive me, makes of you a half-witted conventional. To claim an end when you could claim no beginning.

2. When we found the boxes we picked them all up and called the famous whitemale poet. The famous whitemale poet called the family and stopped them from throwing out anything more. The famous whitemale poet told them, she is a famous whitewoman poet. You must give her to time. Make a history of this present. Asinine is a harsher word, implying ass-like or foolish behavior. The stuff of cravings. Dreams. Beliefs. Belies. Was her writing the substance of torture? The significance of torment?

3. You must conclude after a review of the additional exculpatory evidence that a preponderance FINDING that he actually executed the *agents* cannot be made. It is in big print. If she uses a thesaurus to make her point, is she less of a scribe. Absolution forgiveness dispensation—just us—having supported, for some time, a conversation most uncongenial to his temper, he took his leave. Another word for poem is lay. Lay bare lay off lay out. I am fucking red with wrath. Out. Off. End.

4. Grand adventures await those who are willing to turn the—I \_\_\_\_\_ you to...but pardon me, the pronouns are used. I'll fetch you fresh ones. We have remarkable little evidence of the "story," as opposed to the convention, behind long marriages between women and men who both have established places in the public sphere. He has the gums of a 65-year-old. Soon he will gnaw to guffaw. The time is upon us. This isn't funny, folks. I've stolen every line.

5. Next to of course Carolyn, Hannah I love thee, home of the frauds and land of the Leonards. Where anger is expressed in these autobiographies, it is not used creatively, as by black male authors. Deep thought best thought—if you do it from behind. I see in your future a big apostrophe. Biiiiiig apostrophe. BIG. DEEP. THOUGHT. Cardinal cogitation, correctest cerebation. Rhyme and reason. Deep deep in that black black cell cell. Alone and aware.

6. Power is the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter. Silent teacher superb teacher stagnate teacher—smack sentences upon the death knell of sentences. I can only conclude that his continued incarceration and the failure of the United States to release him on parole is based on animus, you fucking, fucking animal. She cannot sit at

her desk. I only need a few more lines

2 aces

3 eights

she folds

7. Against the dying of—it rises from high in the belly. Everyone is taking them. She wanted to control the selling of pieces of paper, the clerk of the 10th district court. It concerns nobody, but I cannot find out how she achieved. Three strikes and you're—A good record of dead fictional biographies—packed. Packed.

**a.** liberate a prisoner; **b.** a promise made with or confirmed by a pledge of one's honor; **c.** language viewed as a specific individual usage. (He wrote it for her, anyway.) How might her poetry be distinguished from

automatic

writing

CAESURA

8. Release: a linguistic act. Webster's 10th watchword. Your life a pyre. I cannot sit here and write this. Out: not at home gone away away elsewhere absent away from one's desk. Out: cold unconscious senseless knocked- blacked- KO'd. Out: revealed disclosed divulged in the open known public knowledge. Seen for what you are cold out in the open. So far we have not used the word free. Chosen not to heed the ramifications of connection. Powered out. Lies cleared from high in the belly from this or that place. Extemporized. I could go on and on. Let go liberate unshackle. Set/let/turn loose. Exempt. Except. Excuse. Relieve.

*Nobody wrote this.*

Right JUNK sincerely

Yours 

CAROLINE KOEBEL  
FROM FLURRY

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*Flurry* is in search of a state of urgency associated with the artist's past as an adolescent in punk subculture. In mimicry of the way her body once moved in relation to hardcore music, she reenacts the period's signature vertical spasm. The video document of the performance is reworked so that its origin in an intensity of speed and bearing mutates into a different strange animal, the rapid movement dissolving to the point of definition of the individual stills comprising motion.

*Flurry* engages a process of relay between mental images and bodily (re)productions of sites of remembrance. Yet, as the performance extends, mental images recede and sensory perceptions come to the fore. The action begins as staged but quickly becomes auto-performative.

The dancing body confounds memory, belonging nowhere, repulsing time.

The installation is fully realized only when accompanied by the chance factor of falling snow.



Caroline Koebel

Video Stills from *Flurry*

(From *The Vent Series*)

Black-and-white Video Installation

Single-channel Preview at ISA (Havana, Cuba), 2002;

Premiered at CEPA Gallery (Buffalo, NY), 2003.



JOEL BETTRIDGE

“WHOSE LIVES ARE LONELY TOO”: HARRYETTE MULLEN  
READING US INTO CONTINGENCY

*It seems to me that the, that the audience... in listening there is an active participation goin' on there you know and... and when you know that somebody is, maybe moved or... the same way that you are to such degree or approaching degree... it's just like having another member in the group.*

—John Coltrane, 1966, in an interview with Frank Kofsky

Ethics is an uneasy companion to art and poetry. In the nineteenth century Kierkegaard elevated the ethical above the aesthetic, and long before him Plato exiled poetry from the Republic for its corrupting influence. Attaching ethics to poetry may seem additionally unsophisticated to a modern audience uncomfortable with ideas that smack of an ahistorical, or depoliticized, approach. When I join ethics and poetry, then, I do not argue that poems provide representations of universal virtues, nor do I suggest that poetry should furnish ethical lessons. I mean that literary form itself has inherently ethical and political consequences. As Charles Bernstein insists, such “elements as line breaks, acoustic patterns, syntax, etc., are meaningful rather than [contributing] to the meaning of the poem” (12). This acknowledgment must lead to another assertion: how a work means what it does shapes the audience’s understanding of what is meant; the work’s form is the frame through which we view—and understand—the world.

To demonstrate the extent of my prejudice in this regard, let me go further and state that I believe innovative, textually disruptive writing joins ethics and aesthetics most completely, for such work insists that readers move into each others’ lives in

order to create meaning. The consequence of this movement is a recognition that only in claiming an involvement with the lives and meanings of others can we maintain sympathy with them. Extra-personal involvement allows for the claim you make on someone else to be, simultaneously, a link giving your own life over to another. To make social claims is to refuse the model of an isolated, individual lyric “I” and its conservative, linguistically transparent model of self-governance. It is to accept that our conviction is checked by those others who believe differently than ourselves.

The making of social claims is also the move at the center of Harryette Mullen’s poetry, particularly in two of her most recent books, *Muse & Drudge* and *Sleeping with the Dictionary*. *Muse & Drudge* begins:

Sapphire’s lyre styles  
plucked eyebrows  
bow lips and legs  
whose lives are lonely too. (1)

*Muse & Drudge* consistently references pop culture, the Blues and Jazz traditions, as well as African-American culture and modernist poetry. Themes of love, gender, loss and race weave through the entire work, but at all times they move away from overt statement and toward restatement, revision, and alternative possibilities for meaning. This fluid use of reference grounds the musicality of *Muse & Drudge* in the Jazz practice of improvisation. As the poem unfolds, it is never clear what *Muse & Drudge* might end up saying, or how each line will rhyme, pun, or parody the one that came just before it. For example, the last line of the opening stanza is also the last line of the jazz standard “Lush Life.” In it, the singer looks for happiness in the usual places—“jazz and cocktails”—then falls in love, only to be rejected by the beloved after a brief affair. The last verse of the song is “I’ll forget you, I will / While yet you are still / Burning inside my brain / Romance is mush / Stifling those who strive / I’ll live a lush life in some small dive / And there I’ll be, while I rot with the rest / Of those whose lives are lonely too” (Stayhorn 1938). Often the song is performed with multiple, gradual rhythm changes, becoming more subdued by the end. One of the more well-known recordings by John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman (1963 MCA Records) moves from Hartman’s stutter-paced delivery to a Coltrane sax solo following the last line. Coltrane’s solo, however, like Hartman’s vocal inflection (and the piano accompaniment), is at different places livelier or mellower than the meaning the words of the song might suggest. Even when the sound of the music is more restrained toward the end, during

the lost love section, the song still sounds more like a serenade than a lament. This shifting texture gives “Lush Life” a constantly doubled affect. The song’s argument about love—its interest in affection and repulsion, depression and joy, past and present—is magnified in the song’s ability to convey contrary emotions at once.

Referencing such a complex movement significantly impacts the possibilities for lyric subjectivity in *Muse & Drudge*. Harryette Mullen has commented that the opening lines “Sapphire’s lyre styles / plucked eyebrows / bow lips and legs” refer to the blues tradition of associating the body of the female singer with an instrument (1). Barbara Henning has also pointed out that the first line references Sappho, and that the word “Sapphire” is a derogatory term for an unpopular black woman. Compacting all three figures in the single name “Sapphire” allows the marginalized black woman, the female poet of fragments, and the female blues singer to converge. When the final line of “Lush Life” enters the poem the audience—readers—for whom the poet-singer is playing, finds that the singer, in the linking word “whose,” is part of the audience and that it is part of her. Taken as a plural pronoun, the word “whose” describes the loneliness of the performer-poet, but also the loneliness of those listeners to whom she sings: the audience imagines it has always been a group of people sharing the same knowledge. In their shared experience, they can recognize and identify each other. The final word, “too,” completes the loss of individual autonomy on the part of these scorned lovers. Solitude and self-governing disappear when “too” gives each person in the “lonely” group access to every other person’s experiences. The people in this place do not have different lives: “too” demands correspondence, not similarity or relatedness. If the experience of being alone happens together, the group creates the individual’s coherence.

Such grammatical arguments center Mullen’s poetics. The poem “Why you and I,” in *Sleeping with the Dictionary* examines the incongruity of being at once a person with a physical, single body and a person whose life is mixed up in a multitude of other lives. The poetic examination focuses on the relationship between pronouns and the bodies they represent. “Why you and I” closes,

Could anyone guess, does anyone know or even care  
why you and I can’t be found, as hard as we look?  
Who’ll spell out for us, if we exist  
why you and I missed our turn on the list?  
who can stand to reason why you and I let  
our union dissolve to strike the orderly alphabet? (78)



Rather than mourn the loss of individual agency, the repetition of “you” and “I” transfers the love-sick, remorseful tone of the poem from a desire for a lover (a love that affirms the individuality of the lover and the beloved) into a critique of singular pronouns as representative tools. While the problem remains unsolved as to how we can understand ourselves as coherent subjects, and while there is certainly a concern for the place individuals hold in culture—in the “alphabet”—there is a sense that representations of individual identity betray the very object they set out to save. When the “union” of “you and I” “dissolves” “to strike” the “alphabet,” we are left with a sense that “you” and “I” failed us, that “our” union cannot exist as a union of “you and I.” To “strike” means to hit, but it also means to exclude. When confronted with the complex problem of agency inside social and historical contexts, situations where people constantly affect and are affected by other people and cultural forces, readers’ or a poet’s insistence on a “you” and on an “I” does not adequately represent the linguistic and cultural interconnectedness of each of our particular situations. As the poem “Why you and I,” demonstrates, any author’s or readers’ insistence on a “you” and on an “I” is an attempt to step outside—to strike—language and culture because it is an attempt to simplify our linguistic, cultural difficulty; “you” and “I” do not work themselves out in each other, inside the “alphabet,” and thus they cannot do *us* justice. The stakes of this distinction are high. In putting pressure on the way we represent our agency, “You and I” demonstrates that if we are intimately linked, then I have a claim on your actions. It is an argument against individual coherence, for if we are separate from one another, then ethical evaluation and political change based on equity are impossible.

In her chapter on Mullen’s poetry in *Everybody’s Autonomy*, Juliana Spahr does an excellent job of accounting for the use of sampling in Mullen’s poem, demonstrating the way in which *Muse & Drudge*’s layers of reference lead to an impossible unpacking. It is an argument, however, that risks reifying the place of the individual reading subject. Spahr usefully argues that *Muse & Drudge* “urges that readers abandon that feeling of cleverness, of being well trained, of successfully penetrating a work to an exhaustiveness, and instead recognize reading as connective” (113). When Spahr goes on to suggest that to read Mullen’s poetry well, a reader must struggle with the text, making connections between textual references and cultural and personal associations, she makes clear that such a reading strategy leads to both textual difficulty and community formation. In the end, this account leads Spahr to conclude that “difficult moments in Mullen’s work speak to a desire not to shut readers out but to invite them to abandon the standard ways of reading. Readers are invited to be constantly shifting

locations, constantly struggling with a sampled and punned language, to talk back and to talk with. Her work is constructed around a challenge to readerly conventions and the necessity of reader involvement" (117). What I want to suggest in addition is that Mullen's poetic practice of overloading reference signals the inability of the reading subject to maintain individual, useful meaning without turning to the meanings provided by other readers.

Even though *Muse & Drudge* draws on a wide range of sources that enrich the scope of her project, effectively demonstrating a complex reading practice, Spahr's argument appears to propose that connection in Mullen's work is primarily an act of individual reading, and that community occurs when individual readers read this way together, coming to recognize that each makes personal meaning by enacting the same shared process of meaning-making. Spahr concludes,

The reading practice that Mullen's work pursues is one in which readers are forced to realize the variability of both reading and linguistic categories. It is this that her work cultivates to set up a space where productive, unsettled communication can begin between races and genders, as well as between readers and writers. (118)

In this model, types of readings, types of people, and types of linguistic categories are allowed to be different. However, this difference does not mark any essential interconnection between readings, people and categories. Personal agency here appears to be imagined through Saussure's model of meaning and difference, wherein the letter A has meaning because it is not B. A and B themselves are isolated and coherent, needing only each other to be recognized as themselves. In Spahr's argument, no fundamental change in the conception of the individual, lyric-reading subject is allowed for. A potential downfall, then, is that readers would be primarily urged to see alternative possibilities of meaning as ways to widen the scope of individual meaning—but not to explore the heterogeneousness of their own readings and subjectivities. The recognition of difference here establishes difference only as an inherent, abstract good, even while the individual is thought of as finished—a notion of subjectivity that undermines the very usefulness of difference.

Clearly, there are a great many moments in Spahr's *Everybody's Autonomy* that aim for a reading of intersubjectivity, but these moments often end up contradicting themselves. Spahr's model of connective reading, the struggling "with" and "talking to" the poem in order to establish "unsettled communication between races and

genders,” in some ways moves toward a breaking up of the individual ‘I,’ and yet, it cannot do so as long as the different ‘I’s’ engaging in “unsettled communication” are thought of as autonomous. And although the rejection of the coherent ‘I’ is not total in Mullen’s poetry, for it is clearly invested in individual agency *and* community as well as the way these two things are connected, Mullen consistently writes in moments where the individual construction of meaning will remain incomplete.

The limitless possibility of connection in *Muse & Drudge* and *Sleeping with the Dictionary* creates a reading of abundance, which exceeds the opportunity to form autonomous, essentially private meaning: it is the recognition of all readers’ personal implication in the lives of all other readers. If a reader misses most or all of the Jazz references in the poem, such a reading would be radically impoverished. Meaning in Mullen’s work is less a question of correctness than of richness, a richness deeply consequential because it models heterogeneity. To glean the richest possibilities of meaning, readers must look beyond personal stockpiles of association and reference. Seeking out the knowledge of other readers, they must find those moments where individual meaning is amplified through taking on the meanings of someone else. Readers in *Muse & Drudge* are always negotiating the poem’s excessive references; they are always somewhat outside themselves, needing to settle meaning in terms partially not their own. To negotiate the excess of *Muse & Drudge* is itself to define agency.

Which is to say that the reader is always a negotiated subject. Take, for example, the constant changing of the poem’s speaker. Stanzas and lines in the poem often confuse the subject position of the stanzas and lines that precede them. Mullen has herself commented that the various ‘I’s’ of the poem do not represent her, instead moving among a wide range of figures. But never is one of these voices properly named. This construction of potentially limitless identities gives readers a form of referential connection that at once immerses them in the poem and destabilizes this saturation. In *Strangers To Ourselves* Julia Kristeva writes, “The moment when the citizen-individual ceases to consider himself as unitary and glorious [and] discovers his incoherences and abysses, in short his ‘strangenesses’. . . the question arises again: no longer that of welcoming the foreigner within a system that obliterates him but of promoting the togetherness of those foreigners that we all recognize ourselves to be” (2-3). In Mullen’s poetry the speaker always plays the stranger. Because the speaker is never properly named, each time readers make a new connection as to the possible identity of the poem’s speaker there is a chance for readers to both personalize the connection and distance themselves from it, a move that keeps the imagined reading community of the poem evolving as well as mirroring Kristeva’s “togetherness of foreigners.”

To intensify such “strangeness,” *Muse & Drudge* blurs subjectivity most fundamentally in the moments when the poem deals with formations of gender and sexual desire.

she gets to the getting place  
without or with him  
must I holler when  
you’re giving me rhythm

members don’t get weary  
add some practice to your theory  
she wants to know is it a men thing  
or a him thing (51)

The first two lines of the second stanza, “members don’t get weary / add some practice to your theory” (51), break up any stable subject position by bringing in language that seems unconnected to a romantic relationship. These lines invoke any number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophies, perhaps Marxism in particular with its overtones of group struggle and the encouraging lines to not “get weary” in the face of dejection. At the same time, coming right after the line “you’re giving me rhythm,” the word “member” turns into a pun on the man’s penis, as the speaker asks him not to finish up too quickly. This mixing of theoretical and sexual language draws on the relationship connecting individual and group. The “she” and the “he” read as open signifiers, in which the conditions of being male and female structure the assumed personal encounter of non-specific man and woman. Mullen’s reference to theory makes the “him” and “her” of these stanzas responsible to each other and their gender roles, more than it motions toward the uniqueness individual gendered people.

When negotiating these gender roles, readers will bring their personal as well as cultural and biological knowledge of what it means to be a man or a woman into the poem. In the connection of “him” and “her” as gender-specific pronouns, and in readers’ particular understandings of what such words actually mean, gender categories become fluid, neither disappearing nor becoming solid. The above two stanzas first establish distanced third-person subjects, but then quickly turn the “she” to “I” and the “he” to “you.” Mullen sexualizes reading doubly: by invoking sexual intercourse and then grammatically inviting readers to imagine their participation in it. While gender categories are still implied in the first and second-person pronouns,

they are not absolute; the gender of individual readers will inform the pronouns “I” and “you.” In the “I,” male readers may imagine themselves in the sexual act, but as a woman, in many ways recalling Kristeva’s stranger. At the same time they become more aware of themselves as male, because they do not know what it is to be a woman having sex with a man. And although the “you” provides a more familiar position to heterosexual men, it certainly does not retain its familiarity for all forms of masculine sexuality, and it doubles the subject position of the female reader in the same way “I” complicates male-gendered reading. Each subjectivity available in the poem doubles as soon as readers enter the poem as gendered agents, a move that cannot but happen even as readers first sound out the words of each line.

In this doubling of subjectivities, *Muse & Drudge* rewrites the structure of gender relations. It is a doubling that works to undercut the traditional dichotomy of male spectator (reader) and female spectacle (the read object of male discourse) by allowing the sexualized condition of being the “you” in the poem to reverse reading norms. As readers we become both the poem’s subject and the distanced audience, both the object addressed and the object of the poem’s content. *Muse & Drudge* formulates sexual identity as that which stabilizes the poem’s meaning and, simultaneously, as that which is put into question by the poem’s movement between gendered and non-gendered pronouns. In these changing pronouns, the poem’s fluid gender categories become a way for readers to occupy both familiar and unfamiliar subjectivities: a subject read and a subject reading; a sexual position with which they identify, and a way of desiring with which they do not.

As *Muse & Drudge* moves forward from the above stanza, it continues to introduce ‘she’s’ and ‘him’s,’ even ‘I’s’ and ‘you’s,’ that have little to do with the subjects previously established. This movement in and out of ‘him’s,’ ‘her’s,’ ‘we’s,’ ‘I’s,’ and ‘you’s’ further prevents the establishment of a single poetic center; each pronoun becomes momentarily coherent only in the motion toward another pronoun. Take for example the two stanzas that follow those already quoted:

wishing him luck  
she gave him lemons to suck  
told him please dear  
improve your embouchure

tomboy girl with cowboy boots  
takes coy bow in prom gown

your orange California suits  
you riding into sundown (51-2)

Where the “your’s” and “him’s” point remains unclear. The “you” in the former stanza is not necessarily male. The fact that there is no punctuation to indicate a sentence, or single continuing thought, lets each line be read individually. Grammatically, the first stanza is more like two separate couplets, the “without or with him” modifying the first line and the “when” of the third line connecting it to the fourth. Inasmuch as the pronouns are already working as over-determined signifiers, the particulars of how the audience reads or identifies with these pronouns depend less on the poem itself than on the reader. The unspecified “you,” “he” and “she” in this stanza destabilize their routine function. Because each pronoun acts out its role in ways counter to its traditional social role—as a type of gender category and as the means to an alternative identity—the “she” and “he” are not singularly gendered pronouns. These pronouns stand as markers of a now revolving subjectivity, possibly gendered, but not in any absolute, singular manner. *Muse & Drudge* does not create a single sexual reading; instead, reading itself is sexualized as readers take on multiple positions that move among one another, penetrating and informing one another.

The confusion of subject and gender additionally disrupts norms of sexual desire. Once the gender positions of two sexual partners are given over to constant change, the possibility of limiting the sexual subject to a strictly heterosexual category disappears. While it certainly has implications beyond the sexual, the stanza “what you can do / is what women do / I know you know / what I mean, don’t you” can be read as a reference homosexual intercourse, with a textual wink at the reader (“I know you know / what I mean, don’t you” [38]).

As it did with the structural relationship between the viewing male and the viewed female, *Muse & Drudge* refuses the historically disempowering possibility of being penetrated. If being penetrated has traditionally represented a loss of power and authority, the speaker disrupts this representation with the suggestion that someone other than a woman might want to take on that position. The female role of being penetrated is turned into a moment of pleasure, a source of humor, and ground for a constantly changing subjectivity. The queerness of *Muse & Drudge* is its affect—the jokes it makes about, and its deviancy from, expected sexual activities. Ironically invoking penetration while simultaneously calling to mind both male and female subjects turns sexual practice in *Muse & Drudge* into another potential moment of humorous and erotic connection for readers, a connection characterized by fluidity

and not rigid definition.

This queerness, a complication of sexual difference in *Muse & Drudge*, is inflected by an invocation of lesbian as well as gay male sexual desire. Not only do the poem's constant references to Sappho and Gertrude Stein make room for lesbian sexuality, but lines like "she gets to the getting place / without or with him" (51), and "write on the vagina / of virgin lamb paper / mother times mirror / divided by daughter" (14) clearly tangle the terms of female sexual desire. Similarly, there are many lines that are sexually charged but lack gender markers altogether or toy with the autoerotic, lines such as "half the night gone / I'm holding my own" (3), and

what you do to me  
got to tell it  
sing it shout out  
all about it (7)

By confusing categories of sexual difference, *Muse & Drudge* opens the potential meaning of sexual divisions. It is this confusion of categories that indicates the incompleteness of the individual subject while maintaining the value of particular agents and their participation in categories of desire, gender and race. If readers were limited to their own meanings, they would be limited to constructions and representations of sexuality that either conformed to their own, or represented forms with which they were familiar or sympathetic, and certainly *Muse & Drudge* does not limit itself to such simple articulations of meaning. Instead, the poem argues that it is only in connection with the unfamiliar that productive meaning and identity can occur.

In the poem's desire to make complex the individual subject, the gender and racial constructions of *Muse & Drudge* become crucial, for it is often with the sexual and racial Other that our most difficult cultural and personal interactions occur. As critics have pointed out, and as Mullen has commented herself, *Muse & Drudge* draws on a wide range of demographic sources—white, black, Hispanic, and more; gay and straight; male and female. To deal with complex relationships between subjectivity, gender, race, and sexual difference, *Muse & Drudge* samples erotic, culturally specific and racialized vocabularies, creating a sense that while such categories exist, to articulate them in terms of either an individual experience or a unifying theory risks incompleteness. These categories seem unavoidable to the extent that physical observation evidences their reality, but to depend on doctrines of desire, race and gender for the tools of representation is to compromise the meaning of any sexual,

racial and gender consciousness. Take for example the stanza

just as I am I come  
knee bent and body bowed  
this here's sorrow's home  
my body's southern song (80)

Those of us versed in Protestant vernacular will recognize the first line as a sampling of the hymn "Just As I Am," written by Charlotte Elliott in 1836, now in the Presbyterian Church's *Hymn Book*. The first verse of this hymn begins "just as I am, without one plea" and ends with the line "oh lamb of God, I come, I come." Turning this hymn into the line "just as I am I come" and linking it to the lines "knee bent and body bowed / this here's sorrow's home / my body's southern song" (80) effectively joins the predominately white Presbyterian experience with the black slave song and spiritual. The Protestant hymn's praise of Christ and his joining of God and man is also the "sorrow" of the southern slaves' "bent" and "bowed" "body," and yet, *Muse & Drudge* does not recall only southern Christians' support of slavery. The two separate representations of racial experience are joined, not as white to black or master to slave, but as multiple realizations of a single subjectivity. That the racial mixing of this stanza is also genderless magnifies such multiple positions. By collapsing the represented experiences of being white, black, male and female into a single verse, *Muse & Drudge* disrupts our imagined categories of being black and white, male or female, because no single experience of any of these categories is complete. Readers take up the question of what it means to be represented when they explore each new line's invitation to a more disruptive ontology. When white and black join in the lines "just as I am I come / knee bent and body bowed" (80) the subjectivity of each is made in terms of the other; both are necessary for the line's and stanza's meaning.

Undermining a socially conservative rhetoric of essential racial vocabulary in her more recent book, *Sleeping with the Dictionary*, Mullen at several points employs a most subtly disruptive style. "Elliptical," for one, is a series of sentences containing implied or direct universal quantifiers, such as "always" and "never," followed by an ellipsis. The poem begins: "They just can't seem to . . . They should try harder to . . . They ought to be more . . . We all wish they weren't so . . ." (23). What becomes apparent in this poem is not the idea that cultural and racial dialogue, or even critique, is impossible, but that the form of such dialogue is complex, necessarily involving all the misunderstandings, assumptions or insights that we bring with us. While the



experience of the individual plays a crucial role in *Sleeping with the Dictionary*, “Elliptical” also illustrates the danger of relying exclusively on individual experience for the making of meaning, as most such “elliptical” arguments are necessarily incomplete. More often than not, such elliptical arguments are the product of limited experience. In exposing the reader to such critique, “Elliptical” demonstrates that meaning and dialogue must be built on an understanding of subjectivity that begins not from the position of the reader, but of the read.

Whether the sentences are read as a gathering of individual voices, or as one voice, the sentences come to represent a unified cultural category. In “Elliptical” the silence of the ellipses destroys the literalness of each sentence. When it does, the possibility of the speaker’s sentence remaining coherent vanishes because the use of ‘they’ ironically destabilizes the insular ‘I’ of the speaker. The meaning that emerges in the poem when each sentence collapses is the ironic structure of the whole. It is this ‘whole,’ in the end, that becomes an indictment of each reader’s participation in cultural rhetorics of group formation. It excludes the possibility of individual exemption (“I didn’t own slaves”; “I didn’t take Native-American land”) and replaces it with moments of self-recognition and self-accusation without falling back onto a quaint attitude of tolerance. “Elliptical” is concerned with how we talk to each other; well-meaning and violent intentions both lead to the same place when based on singular readings. “Elliptical” and *Muse & Drudge* alike argue that individual meaning—and thus individual subjectivity—is always contingent on the meanings other subjects make from the same materials and with the same language.

It is this insistence on the productivity of incompleteness, a celebration of breaks in understanding, that gives Mullen’s work over to its readers. Politically, it is an aesthetic recognition that the renegotiation of the reading subject is the political reconstitution of the social whole.\* If all subjects are linked, then remaking one in the move toward more complete meaning suggests that every other subject, and the larger social space that subject occupies, becomes part of that transformation. Openness in Mullen’s work demands that readers explore how meaning moves them into particular social and political allegiances.

Mullen returns to questions of meaning, community and subjectivity in *Sleeping with the Dictionary*. Her attention remains focused on language’s social character through her characteristic playfulness with language—Oulipo techniques,

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\*This argument has a great deal to do with the poetics of those involved with L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E writing, many of whose works are now collected in *Writing Talks*, *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, *The Politics of Poetic Form*, *Paradise & Method*, *In The American Tree*, and *The New Sentence*.

puns, cultural reference and jokes. In “Mantra for a Classless Society, or Mr. Roget’s Neighborhood,” Mullen uses the thesaurus to demonstrate how language is always employed in judgment and categorization with lines like, “poverty-stricken embarrassing” and “sheltered protected private concealed covered” (49). The language of the poor becomes the language of shame. The language of safety and protection quickly becomes the language of exclusion. In the ‘alphabet poem’ titled “Jinglejangle” the letter D stanza goes

date rape deadhead deep sleep dikes on bikes dilly-dally  
ding-a-ling ding-dang dingle-dangle  
ding-dong dirty birdy Dizzy Lizzy dog log Don Juan  
Donut Hut double trouble downtown dramarama  
drape shape dream team Dress for Success drill & kill  
drip-drop drunk skunk dry eye (34).

Disturbing images and phrases like “date rape” and “drill & kill” mix with cultural references (“Donut Hut”) or disjunctive alliterations (“downtown dramarama”), and the poem itself provides a great deal of oral and reading pleasure. This soundscape creates a reading that moves in and out of shock, humor, pleasure and distaste. The meaning readers find in the negotiation of these spinning references rests on two sources: the words and their personal experiences.

It is the mixing of these two responses that is crucial. Where “date rape” brings notions of violence and betrayal to mind, the possible evocations of “downtown dramarama” are as varied as the readers. The inconsistency of references forces readers to constantly amend their own meanings. Mullen’s vision of American culture is both brutal and joyous—which is to say, complex, and thus in need of constant attention and change. How readers move between these poles—what they find pleasurable, and what they find difficult and confusing—is not only what constitutes their understanding of the poem, but what determines their reading of the poem’s political and social messages. And in the end, the two cannot be separated. Just as “date rape” is absolutely brutal, it also fits into the soundscape of the poem; each D sound after it, regardless of its innocence, must recall the violence that initiated it.


To speak or read inside Mullen’s poetry is to acknowledge the connection we have to our environments and the people in them. The political possibilities of this poetry—challenging routines of violence and exclusive understandings of subjectivity—depend not on freeing readers of meanings other than their own, but on the

acknowledgment that what they believe about the making of meaning has a significant effect on the world. If we believe that meaning is already made, that one specific truth about politics, economics, religion, is “just the way it is,” then we have no responsibility to examine the effects of those beliefs. If we understand that the way we do what we do is the thing that constructs our social realities, then we must recognize that how we choose to speak and act in the world is always a claim about how the world should be. It is an acknowledgment that each new reading pushes the world in one direction or another.

Mullen’s writing reveals that our social and linguistic connections shape our political realities. Readers are not freed from social accountability because they make meaning for themselves. It is the very way in which readers must think about meaning in Mullen’s work that names their responsibility to the world here and now. The true aim of radical American politics is always a self-authorship leading to social transformation, a position that takes as its point of departure the belief that the world is made by our articulation of it. Each action, each meaning, must be understood as a political act with particular ethical consequences. The manner in which particular meanings are conceived—what one believes about how meaning is made—perpetuates a specific way of thinking about our social realities.

Mullen embraces the complexity of language as something to revel in, push, examine, not as something from which to escape. We can speak and act because we must. Our ethical and political responsibility is to constantly evaluate our condition in language. It is in this way that we can see words abused by others or by ourselves for the sake of power, and it is there that we can ground our lived resistance to that abuse. In Mullen’s work, words become part of that evaluation because they are the tools with which we create our surroundings; they are what we use to examine meaning and thought. *Muse & Drudge* and *Sleeping with the Dictionary* recognize that while we must communicate, we must examine how we communicate; that while we judge, we must examine how we judge. By sharing our words and meanings, we recognize that meaning is borne of negotiation. Without a claim on the life of another—that is, someone else’s meaning—and without someone else’s claim on your own, there is neither reason nor way to change social realities. It is only in recognizing our right to others’ ideas that we can hear them and allow for our conversation.

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SUSAN BRIANTE  
FOUR POEMS

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3RD DAY OF THE RAINY SEASON ∞

Mist treads down the mountain roof by roof to rest beside me.

White-tongued bougainvillea embrace a fishtail palm.

Romance plays no part.

Cuts of raw beef fill flatbeds hurling up the hill.

I sit with my legs closed, a single woman edging a plaza in Taxco.

My gaze zigzags like a taxi through this developing Tuesday.

A downpour rinses the municipal palace; ether stuns the cortex.

Dawn is the damp hand slipped beneath my knee.

A farmhand in front of a Banamex shakes water from the brim of his hat.

La limpieza es calidad de vida.

A boy opens his mouth to swallow the droplets.

Exaggerated tenderness, writes André Tridon, is a cover for the death wish.

Propane canisters rattle, church bells come ragged as a second pulse.

Romance plays no part.

Coming down the mountain like a fist I can feel inside of me, a kick.

Whole neighborhoods numb to the needlework of rain.

## 5TH DAY OF THE RAINY SEASON ∞

Between window washer and curb, a galaxy swirls.

Between windshield and rag, office towers waiver.

Old ladies pluck orange candies from pink market tubs.

Passionflower vines capture red and blue wavelengths of light.

Any search requires a preposition as in “Estoy buscando *a* mi amigo”.

Tradewinds skirt a Flamazul truck with its license plates from the interior.

Water trembles in a cistern with nothing to heat it.

The frigid woman, writes André Tridon, is a cripple or a neurotic.

Jacaranda trees bloom like lightning strikes.

“To the girl with the prettiest eyes,” he says handing me his knife.

Nutrient cycling occurs through a process similar to valet parking.

Between my lover and myself, a preposition stiffens like cinder block brick.

A guard in a bullet-proof vest hoses a pick-up.

Every time he’s out of my sight: “Estoy buscando *a* mi querido”.

A broom licks the sidewalk. A slice of flesh-red mamey slips from his blade.

EVENTUAL DARLING ∞

Morning streets blot their lips;  
more enunciations irregular  
the manyblocks slur illegible, illicit;  
an afterrain illuminates  
scripts of February sycamores.

And no one here to tell it.

Before the Farragut Housing Complex,  
the does-not-belong-to-you chiffon in waves of refuse settles  
on shores of the BQE; from Jamaica Ave to Fort Green  
your soul loiters behind in the scaffolded ether

to hover like postcards, like a see-through Bill of Rights,  
in the universal language of focus groups and transit cops,

to leave you book by book and block by block,  
a plastic bag gesticulating from razor wire.

EVENTUAL DARLING ∞

Cables of dust bind the farmers' wives to plastic flowers, pesticides, bikes,  
to plastic sacks of cassava; in slip-knot and pitch, the present  
perfected voice of Agence France-Presse slingshots through east Kinshasa.

Inside the canvas, a picture does not finish.

Shepherds of reflex and deviation with preferences for "sticks  
trowels, knives," with preferences for nipple clamps and half-light,  
chase flocks of pandemics across withered earth

to swat and prod at syphilophiac scars,  
while the rooftops of a processing plant glisten like hand mirrors,  
while the tanks of a refinery shimmer like a silver backed brush and comb. ☒

ARNALDO VALERO  
ANTHRO-POP-PHAGI

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For a long time the director of *Urbe*,<sup>1</sup> a weekly Venezuelan magazine, thought about a new literary project. He imagined a novel that would strategically mix detective-story suspense with eroticism and narcotics, appealing to a dormant audience that so far had shown no interest in conventional writing. Alejandro Rebolledo says the formula he developed resembles a 1990's attitude that has found its truest expression in the phrase "Tripping Technology." The allure of the Internet, video games, synthetic drugs, techno, comics, and music videos resides in the possibility they offer to shape everyday experience into the pursuit of pleasure. The literary result, and the reader's final verdict, would rest on the degree of pleasure the text offered. The fact that two editions of *Pin Pan Pun* (1998) sold out in less than a year indicates how accurate Rebolledo's prediction was.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Rebolledo has also talked about psychodelia. The following statements illustrate his conception of the term: "In my first attempt at writing, I wanted to portray something I thought was unique about my historical moment: the neon, the television, the punk rock, the buildings, the video clips, the disappointment, the confusion." And, "There was no doubt a shared foundation, a generational comfort zone that to some extent supported such concerns, but which I insisted on separating from any collective and social soul. I would bring that shared material into my own vortex, a personalized blender revolving around my own head, a move I baptized 'psychodelia.' Not the Beatles' psychodelia, the funky colors melting together behind the hippies. It was more about a name that would sound rich, phonetically speaking, as a way of translating the world in which cartoonish green cowboys epitomized the roles of urban petty thieves and overdosing telepaths with super powers. New times, colors, relations, and aesthetics that—I don't know why—I thought I would be able to transmit with some verbs and noun combinations."



However, Venezuela's academic establishment has shown evident contempt for *Pin Pan Pun*. This attitude was thrown into question as soon as the jury of the eleventh Rómulo Gallegos International Novel Award<sup>3</sup> included *Pin Pan Pun* among its 30 finalists, thus recognizing its relevance among all Latin American novels published in a two-year period. If academic reproaches about sensationalist advertisement and editorial artifice failed to convince the jury, why does the scholarly sector continue to hold *Pin Pan Pun* in such low esteem?

One inevitably thinks of the essay "Eight Arms to Hold You," in which Hanif Kureishi recalls the sensation of listening to the Beatles in music appreciation classes: "Uplifting, an act so unusually liberal it was confusing."<sup>4</sup> Yet the professor who conceived of this act did so in order to show that the group who established pop culture was a fraud:

The Beatles had not been born immersed in knowledge; nor had they acquired it in any recognized academy or university. . . . [They] were only ignorant, bad-mannered, and rude . . . boys, boys who would never, in a just world, do anything interesting with their lives. (359)

According to Kureishi, his music appreciation teacher's position is just one sign of a cultural vertigo that people started to experience in the mid-sixties. Until then, the notions of culture, history, and education were not relative; they did not shift with differential tastes or decisions. There seemed to be set criteria, notions of objectivity. "But that particular form of certainty, of intellectual authority, along with many other forms of authority, was shifting. People did not know where they were any more" (360).

Attitudes towards *Pin Pan Pun* are probably shifting now for some members of the Venezuelan academic establishment. It has been three decades since the collapse of their great narrative models imbued with leftist orientations. Despite that collapse, other cultural interventions from those decades have gone unnoticed by the academy. The newer narratives have seemed to be transitory, barely mentioned with the condescension one gives to cultural journalism in Sunday's paper. Julio Miranda, the author of *El Gesto de Narrar* (1998), considers the novels published in Venezuela after *El Osario de Dios* (1969) to be responses to an established model: the "crisis of narratives of 'compromise'" revealed in totalizing novels like *País Portatil* (1968) (22-25). Miranda also points out that these works, not being able to create their own audience, lacked consumer indicators and "social mandates." In the face of this reality, the academic establishment finds it unacceptable that the urban punks who put a momentary end

to judging book consumption according to academia's literary criteria don't even see themselves as obedient followers in the cultural tradition, as the establishment conceives it. For an example of the institutional attitude toward culture we can refer to pronouncements by Adriano González León,<sup>5</sup> published in the *Papel Literario* of *El Nacional*<sup>6</sup> on Sunday, October 17, 1999. González León recommends a bunch of readings including the Bible (it is curious, by the way, that he did not suggest reading *Das Capital*), to the editors of *Urbe* and questions their taste. The fact that the author of *País Portátil* has become the establishment's spokesman poses quite a few questions. Is this the result of an inability to articulate new directions for Venezuelan culture? Why? Does it mark a generational shift?

## MAGIC POP REALISM?

What happens when a novel is recommended by a pop star? This is one of the questions that Néstor García Canclini does not ask in *Hybrid Cultures*. He asks about the influence an author such as Umberto Eco can have, in terms of public perception and acceptance, when his face appears in the cover of *Time* magazine. He also asks what happens when an established author is interviewed on prime-time television ("destruction of the codes of cultivated knowledge or aesthetization of the market?"). In our case, the concrete question is: What happens when a member of a band such as Aterciopelados, Amigos Invisibles, or Café Tacuba recommends a novel? How important is it for a quasi-illiterate person to know the opinion held about a book by a specialist such as Luís Brito García, Maruja Dagnino, Alexis Márquez Rodríguez, or some graduate scholar from an obscure literature program at a Venezuelan university? How much does it affect the marketing of a book when the praise comes within strictly academic parameters—versus praise in the form of a quasi-generational slogan of someone who appears on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, is an MTV share-holder, has dinner in Schwarzenegger's restaurant, has been nominated for or awarded the Grammy, and looks like a tropical version of Marilyn Manson? These are all symbols of mass-media prestige in our global village. They stimulate consumer loyalty from a sector concerned more about the consumption of symbols than about economic and intellectual productivity.

"Fuck, party, and get high." That seems to be the fundamental motto of the youths who stage their lives in the urban spaces of contemporary Venezuela. Probably not even 2% of these young people can read or write correctly. They have been driven there by a stultifying political project that pretended to democratize a partisan

dynamic, assuming democracy as equality in mediocrity.<sup>7</sup> It is probably due to the current media culture that a captivated MTV audience took an interest in the Chiapas uprising as soon as Cafetas started to talk about Subcommander Marcos or when Benetton offered him a fortune to exhibit their fashions.

Contrary to common belief in Venezuela, the country's MTV generation has expressed an identity. Within this group, we may recognize exceptional individuals with consistent visions of the world. They even have a "practical manual for the executive punk" (a table of laws for the end of the millennium!):

1. Fuck the world.
2. Never save money because you don't know what can happen.
3. Don't marry the chick you truly love. You'll stop loving her.
4. Don't work with your friends, because you'll lose them.
5. No matter what, never, ever play with the police because you'll end up either dead or in jail.
6. Never trust a guy who wears cowboy boots.

(*Pin Pan Pun*, 194-195)

I insist that this sector of Venezuela's late capitalist society is expressing an identity. It's the only identity that our frantic civilization, heir to Latin American populist politics oriented more toward *caudillismo* than humanism, has allowed this generation to develop. These youths are all children of AD and the Christian Socialists . . . but what if their squandering, their excesses, their aggression, and their self-destruction fully express their generation's style of civic participation? What if the only privilege they have torn from history is to do what they please with their lives? Well, if this is the case, their reality has come to life in *Pin Pan Pun*. Just for the record, that misunderstood and alienated mass has purchasing power. The novel's publishers know it and use their icons to seduce them. A marvelous end-of-the-millennium mass-media mercantilist utopia, isn't it?

## A PUNK ICONOCLAST

DJ—or disk jockey, if you prefer—journalist, and iconoclast Alejandro Rebolledo does not acknowledge predecessors in the literature of our continent:

I don't know what Magic Realism means. [*Pin Pan Pun*] is not, for instance, like *Como Agua Para Chocolate*, which is ridiculous. My book is not like the stupidity of always setting the Latin American novel on a plantation in the

middle of nowhere . . . I can't deny that when I had to read [*One Hundred Years of Solitude*] in my junior year in high school, I succumbed to García Márquez's pastoral melancholy. But after a while I got bored and couldn't finish the book. I wanted to read other things. I think that people like me are tired of the fact that the Latin American novel is always associated with García Márquez, his hens, and the drama of the dislocated bohemian drunkard . . . Those things having to do with hens and flying toads or the drama of rum-soaked ex-guerrilla fighters aren't entirely to my liking. (in Torrelles)

I cannot read Cortázar or García Márquez, and their nostalgic world ends up cornering me as a reader. They are neither acidic nor clear and are not at all contemporary like the English-language writers. (in Lebon)

The Macondo saga and its hyperbolic downpours have certainly turned Latin American narrative into a swamp. Fascination with García Márquez's genius initiated a kind of endogamic cycle, a process in which every manifestation of the literary system became predictable. Some of us thought that Isabel Allende, for instance, conducted a marketing study before she sat down to write her first novel. The question on her survey was, what do foreign readers expect from a Latin American novelist? The answer was obvious: the *House of Spirits*. The circle closed. The endogamic pact with the monsters of Magic Realism became incestuous, so much so that every move could be anticipated in advance. What would come after *Like Water for Chocolate*? Easy! *Aphrodite*: tales, recipes, and other aphrodisiacs. It is no accident that Isabel Allende is the author of this compendium of flashiness that not even Delia Fiallo<sup>8</sup> herself could top in the era of Viagra and DNA. Now, as the cycle continues, there will always be someone telling silly little stories about the de-hierarchization of discursive forms and the emergence of femininity from spaces to which it had traditionally been confined. After *Aphrodite*, to what were we exposed? To a recipe book of Lacandon<sup>9</sup> aphrodisiacs consumed by Sub-commander Marcos's people? By whom? By Laura Esquivel, of course.

## A MASS MEDIA GENEALOGY

In these circumstances, it is understandable that Rebolledo reacts against antecedents in Latin American narrative. Borges says, "All writers create their precursors [and] their work modifies our conception of the past; in the same way it will

modify the future" (711-12). If so, then with Rebolledo we are at the threshold of a process that takes Bret Easton Ellis, Hanif Kureishi, Quentin Tarantino, Stanley Kubrik, and, why not, the author of *The Simpsons* himself, Matt Groening, as its tutelary monsters. Aren't Luis Lapiña and Caimán extensions of the incorrigible Bart? In any case, I have located a couple of texts in the Latin American narrative tradition that could be considered partial antecedents to *Pin Pan Pun*. I am talking about *El Atravesado*, by Andrés Caicedo, and *Piedra de Mar*, by Francisco Massiani.

When asked if he knew these authors, Rebolledo responded,

I only know the authors you're talking about by name and, no, I haven't read them. For me, writing is not the result of reading. Generally speaking I'm a bad reader, and my literary references are, in the best of cases, infrequent and rather orthodox. I sat down in front of the computer and allowed common sense to impose itself upon sadness, irreverence, and imagination; that was all, I believe.

Every book finds its own genealogy. Perhaps the origin of *Pin Pan Pun* was in the character of Corcho,<sup>10</sup> with his moving candor, or "el atravesado." *Piedra de Mar* is probably closer to Rebolledo's first novel in terms of opening up new alternatives for the national narrative. However, Andrés Caicedo's works claim the acidity and contemporaneity so dear to the author of *Pin Pan Pun*. *Corcho*'s insecurity could also be the antecedent for what Rebolledo has called the "middle point between the post-rational and the illogical" and the modern lucidity of Luís Lapiña. Both tendencies would always represent the indecipherable condition of anguish that preys on so many adolescents.

Today, the city of Corcho has grown terribly; it is a megalopolis, closer in its savage violence to the city that served as scenario to Cali's characters. Caracas is no longer the "subsidiary of heaven," as it was once called. Were it not for certain monuments, raised as vestiges of an architectural project<sup>11</sup> that was never fully realized, nobody would believe that Caracas was ever so safe and angelically profitable; nostalgia does not persuade as well as steel.

The Palos Grandes is not as it used to be. Caracas is not the same. People live terrorized by violence, robberies, and all that shit, but no way, nobody fools me. Caracas has gotten more bland now. Perps, dead victims, mugging, and poverty have existed as long as I can remember, but in recent years people have gone more paranoid, more moralistic and conservative. In the past there

were freedom, drugs, and follies. I don't know, either people are on a new wavelength or I got stuck on a different one. There's a black cloud over this damn place. (*Pin Pan Pun*, 11)

Punk parties wreaked havoc but did not carry their original rebelliousness, and neither did reggae. The very first video clip ever made differs from the last one we watched on MTV a few minutes ago only in the fact that its images have been multiplied one thousand times per second. At the end of that radiating expanse of images, the message is the same. It's the nothingness, a nothingness that can't be covered up by boasts about heroic and irrelevant revolution simulated by thousands of bands in their five minutes of fame in the TV marketplace. That's why we have hallucinogens: to squeeze the utmost furor out of the moment—but without allowing any neo-hippie romanticisms. If something profitable has been achieved with technological advances, it is the production of synthetic hallucinogens. These days, when the ghost of the Cold War lies buried under the weight of the Berlin wall, the promise of XTC is more beautiful than an old post-war paving stone. It's the only utilitarian form that the dark empire of military technology allows us to enjoy in our hemisphere in these postmodern times. If this were not true, then what sense would it make to hold techno parties?—the same sort of parties where Alejandro Rebolledo has been the DJ.

“DISC JOCKEY? WEIRD OCCUPATION FOR A WRITER.”

This laconic comment was all I could get the first time I referred to *Pin Pan Pun* in an academic environment. “A difficult text to gnaw at.” People from the old school will always find a pretext to underestimate it. Certainly, *Pin Pan Pun* would not offer a specialized critic the narrative performance and discursive competence so highly praised in a more established writer. On the contrary, a grammarian or any scholar could speak of linguistic handicaps in the narrators of this polemic novel. But how else would a character whose brain was burnt out by drugs and MTV represent his universe? Or a well-to-do girl who wants to be a cartoon heroine from *Sailor Moon*? Or a slum scourge who sees in McDonald's the culmination of his benumbed and marginal idea of urban glamour? We are faced with a gallery of characters never before offered by Venezuelan authors, characters whose particular and emblematic condition is asserted in every sentence.

Julián, Caimán, Chicharra and Luís. Only two of us are left from the Palos Grandes gang. Caimán in a wheel chair, and me. Chicharra was killed in '87. The idiot went into Sarría in a BMW to flirt with crack and never got out. Julian kicked off in '92. He shot himself because of Claudia, that bitch! She left him for Carlos. (11)

I am not ignoring the feminine consistency of the exquisite María Eugenia Alonso,<sup>12</sup> nor the spontaneous initiative of the writer-apprentice of *Piedra de Mar*. Not at all. I simply see that in *Pin Pan Pun* the author, sacrificing all pretensions to omniscience, lets the characters be. He bets on never-before-tried routes, placing characters onstage without imposing a pre-approved "literary" language on them. There on the stage, the subjects become their sexuality, and the other comes into human existence only as long as s/he generates desire.

## CONCLUSION

The way *Pin Pan Pun* made people reconsider the Venezuelan canon, its acceptance and influence in the unfolding Venezuelan narrative of the 1990s, depends more on extra-aesthetic factors, such as marketing techniques and mass advertising, than on any authorial intention to create an aesthetically autonomous novel. Before the publication of Alejandro Rebolledo's *opera prima*, Venezuelan scholars observed a tacit limitation: to keep their distance from mass media frivolities. By contrast, the editor and author of *Pin Pan Pun* opted for unconventional strategies of interpretation and communication for his novel: methods so linked to market circulation that textual reception, subordinated as it is to the expectations of a consuming audience, cancels or postpones any search for aesthetic autonomy. But who would dare deny the accuracy of the language, absurdity, and wit that swell the book's narrative chronotopes: a narcotic bite, a novel terrible as the stigma of the city, the mark of Cain?

*Translated by Henry Lezama*

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## TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

1. This weekly publication ran in Caracas in the early 90's. To assure its acceptance by a young audience hungry for novelties, the editors projected an image that could be called *amarillismo sifrino* (snobbish yellow press). In Venezuelan usage, this term describes the boasting and frivolities of the nouveau riche. However, underneath this image that seemed to guarantee *Urbe's* profitability, the editors intended to make readers reflect on a variety of issues, ranging from political and socioeconomic intolerance to the nation's irrational consumerism. *Urbe* also addressed the hedonistic potential of a new sexuality free of prejudices but conscious of risks and preventions. At its best, *Urbe* used lucidity, freshness, and irreverence to make reading enjoyable, bias-breaking, and informative.
2. Another variant of the expression that serves as title for Rebolledo's novel is "pin, pun, pan." As a Venezuelan, I remember the expression as a nonsensical conversation filler used by young people (especially males) to narrate a sequence of events about which no specific details were expected or needed. Thus someone could describe a fight that erupted at a party and summarize the outcome by interjecting *pin, pun, pan* as a fashionable cliché. E.g.: "We were at a party, dancing and drinking, and *pin, pun, pan*... There were the girls, and we were having a good time, *pin, pun, pan*... And all of a sudden here comes this guy complaining about me talking to his girl and he disrespects me so I react and *pin, pun, pan* the party's over." The expression was street jargon, speech I didn't use at home for fear of my parents' response.
3. A competition honoring Rómulo Gallegos, Venezuela's most famous writer (author of *Doña Bárbara*, *La Trepadora*, *Canaima*, *Pobre Negro*, among other novels). The award



was created by Venezuelan President Raúl Leoni in 1964 and is now considered the most prestigious literary award in South America, with the additional incentive of more than \$47,000.00 in prize money. It was first awarded in 1967 to Mario Vargas Llosa for his novel *The Green House*. Other laureates include Gabriel García Márquez (1972), Carlos Fuentes (1977), Arturo Uslar Pietri (1991), and Javier Marías (1995).

4. All quotes and pagination from Kureishi refer to the original text in English: *London Kills Me. 3 Screenplays and 4 Essays* (New York: Penguin, 1992).

5. Adriano González León became one of the most important authors of his time when *País Portátil*, now considered a work that renovated Venezuelan aesthetic codes, won the internationally acclaimed Biblioteca Breve Seix Barral Award in 1968. González León became an illustrious proponent for currents of change that Latin American leftists supported all across the continent after the triumph of the Cuban revolution. However, the surprising silence that followed the publication of *País Portátil* has been interpreted by Venezuelan critics as the sum of defeat and “alcoholemia” (alcohol + bohemia), cultivated by many members of the so-called ‘60s Generation after they failed in attempts to govern the country according to their ideologies.

6. *El Nacional* is probably the most important newspaper in Venezuela. It includes literary criticism and reviews every Sunday in the *Papel literario*.

7. The author refers to the bipartisan dynamic that dominated Venezuela’s politics after ousting dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez in 1958. AD (the Democratic Action Party) and COPEI (the Christian Socialists) shared power with a third rightist party, the URD, from 1958 to 1993. The three parties agreed to a “common minimum program” that would guarantee continuity in any governmental policy. According to some critics, this pact ended up being an agreement of complacency and complicity, by which these parties covered up for one another, exploited the country’s riches, and did very little to improve people’s well-being, especially regarding education. “The more ignorant, the better,” seemed to have been the motto.

8. Cuban-born writer, probably the most popular (or infamous) soap opera creator in Venezuela and many other Latin American countries. Roger Vilain called Fiallo “la partera de los mas grandes culebrones,” the midwife for the biggest snakes. (See *Caleidoscopio Venezuela*, Sept. 3, 2001). “Culebrón” is Venezuelan slang for soap opera, literally meaning “big snake.” Through stories such as *Topacio*, *Cristal*, *Leonela*, and *Atrevete*, Fiallo popularized a Cinderella-like formulaic style whose predictability made people joke about the exact chapter when a protagonist would have an accident and lose his or her memory, go to jail, or discover rich parents who would change his or her life overnight.

9. Indigenous community that lives in Chiapas and Guatemala.

10. Narrator of *Piedra de Mar* whose “cosmovision” harmonizes intimate relationships between character expression and the rhythm of events. Choro is an adolescent whose deepest desires are to become a writer and get an affectionate, understanding girlfriend.

11. The 1939 Rotival Project was to make Caracas a city unique in the world for its architecture. The utopian idea was to combine colonial, classical, and modern architecture in a human-friendly environment where the green could still co-exist with the gray. For various reasons, among which we can count chaotic urban developments resulting from uncontrolled migration, terrible political decisions, and a lack of social planning in response to continued urban growth, Frenchman Maurice Rotival could not carry out his ideas (avenues and gardens designed *a la Champs Elysees*). Neither could Dirk Bornhorst and his wife, whose magnificent *Helicoide* is now a police headquarters. Only Carlos Raul Villanueva’s *Ciudad Universitaria* was finished and recently joined the UNESCO’s list of architectural heritage sites. Villanueva’s *23 de Enero* (a residential complex), on the other hand, is now one of the most dangerous places in the country.

12. María Eugenia Alonso is the narrator and main character of Venezuelan author Teresa de la Parra’s celebrated novel *Ifigenia. Diary of a Young Lady Who Wrote Because She Was Bored* (1924). The conservative sector of Latin American society attacked de la Parra’s novel, calling it “voltairean, perfidious, and very dangerous” to young ladies. The novel, structured as a diary, is a brilliant and ironic manifesto about the role of women in society. Alonso’s “diary” was widely read and cited by scholars throughout the twentieth century. ❌

NICK LAWRENCE  
FIVE POEMS

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SEASON ∞

Once, if memory swerves, my life was a tourniquet where every hurt revoked itself, where every solution flowed over understanding's jagged rim. What was flawed in love restyled itself in fever, putting bodies on the frail lathe of mind's inability to stop turning things over. We maxed out, but only locally; a stage whisper from the world spirit brought us back to consciousness in our dim-bulb bedrooms. Boredom was our watchword. We kept falling between the lines, telling time, waiting in a mood-robe for a nonarbitrary sign: a bitmap, bra-strap, phonecall, manifesto. To empty out a person entirely, from head to feet: Plan B, doable but (we hoped) unnecessary. To decorate the electronic grotto, nurse the purple methane flame of aspiration in its dark nook: that was, for the time being, enough. We were about to die in sixty years.

action; apology, the; biography; "climacteric"; days; domesticity;  
emancipation; "fate"; forerunners; "grace"; history; insight;  
literary ethics; moods; ode; problem, the; rhodora; seashore;  
sphinx; travel; voluntaries; waldeinsamkeit; youth

## SLAVES ∞

At night all slaves are gray. But slave talk isn't just cheap, it's free—

free in the emaciated sense—and how talkers work their freedom pays their way.  
“Freedom you *say*—”

more fed up than bred to task, more tired than tried. What then to write becomes a question in the dark

to write, to try to find a light for it. Sincere performance of a degrading role: big plenty opportunity for you. You are—not seared by wrong so much as blistered by belonging.

“Were it only so.” As if, as if, as if the whole thing could be sewn up by now. Instead the bell keeps belling, the alarm alarming, refusing

to take bleared sleepy slaps for an answer. The bed keeps bedding. We swear—we are. Cottonmouthed, our answer densens into unawake filaments. Embedded words without a flag to flare.

The larger mechanism gives rise to the smaller one. To park, to sleep and by that slip-knot of a tongue's impatience pour corridors out of the world's hospital

Some days untroubled, some undergone

*Algeciras; Alice (in Wonderland); “Basic Banalities”; Bettina; Brownie's Book; Buffalo; Crisis, The; dancing; Darkwater; Etsons (Ettens?); Function of the Orgasm; “Grandfather Clauses”; Heliogabalus; Jukes, the; Life against Death; Presence Africaine; Satan; Tintin*

TOURISM ∞

And those microscopic lizards you get down there, and the pigeon-leather drums; and in the evenings they brush off cheese lice from the cartwheel-sized rinds and deep-fry them in a hopper dunked in hissing fat. And that flowering shrub's big lobe-like petals with a waxy pinchfeel, clunking instead of floating to the ground. And in a corner of the market they boil up this syrup from squat blue fruit clusters. And that milk of magnesia sky over everything. And the boys and girls playing in the clearing.

“or as Butler says—

‘The value of a thing  
is just as much as it will bring’”

∞

and hurt and spit, a mix  
of half-parted lips and  
fascination tending toward  
exaltation in slightly bloodshot  
eyes' reflected light  
from the war-torn East, at 6 AM  
walking the dogs in the park and getting mugged  
by two guys in parkas with semi-automatics

## WORLDCOM ∞

Nader would have seen a reason for living in a town like this, with its mix of luxe condos and rising-sun shantytowns, its starlings in the cherry orchards, its gated raves, its deaf jerks on ecstasy, its turquoise swimming pools spotted from an incoming plane like contact lenses dropped on a green baize table; its civil twilight, lowering the cosmic rheostat a little earlier each day, weaning the populace from sunset provisions and overhead transparencies. Distance so close you can taste it. The newspaper every morning breaks the bread of news and feeds its readers the crumbs:

Wealthy Nations Express Optimism  
Cultural Insanity Defense Dropped  
Teens Plant Saplings at Versailles  
In Shadow of Reactors, Parents Seek Peace of Mind in a Pill

Or soberly reports the latest education results: Students in the Northeast and Central States outperformed those in the West and Southeast. Whites outperformed blacks and Hispanics. The poor did poorly. Quick phone call:

Hello  
who's this  
who's this  
no who's this  
I think you have the wrong number ☒

PEDRO MARQUÉS DE ARMAS  
FOUR POEMS

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DISGUISED THOUGH ∞

disguised though  
by that white flower  
(plumeria)  
yielding its shadow  
you saw  
in the roofing of the church  
disguised though  
a hole

and all around  
as if asleep  
the same people  
(people of 1844)  
breaking the earth  
heavily  
with jawbones  
faces angled to Camper's measurements

and you thought  
a hole

a hole  
a hole  
unfathomable  
though disguised

## 1.5 HOURS ON HORSEBACK ∞

1.5 hours on horseback and finally: ruins of the Kentucky, coffee plantation with “great stone-walled drying rooms” — route’s nodal point. We feel around for branching and divisory lines, landmarks named *bobtail-horse trails* by French colonists. But spreading scrub consumed it all; rust and grass, even to the demolished mill-and-organ; stocks; dried-up edges; clenched brushland lacking any human trace.

Current *regional* production: does not exceed 12 000 cans.

Of the Kentucky: not even a plank, no worn inscription.

Pillars.

General Poverty . . .

## MANDRAKE ∞

At the inside edge of the border, which others prefer to describe as a blind alley, —B. killed himself.

Of course, all borders are mental, and in B.’s case it would be best to speak of two.

So B. killed himself between that inside edge and the wavecrest of a thought no longer angling away from him.

As a catapult he took the roots of an alkaloid he’d



classified, and, tossing himself onto the rough bed  
of fusiform pieces, he finally found what he'd been  
looking for: one-way street where all numbers are indistinct,  
white brain masses dissipating into a matter of dreams.

## LITTLE CHINA ∞

for R.S.M.

in lieu of China  
the walls that gave way  
so you  
elapsed (at length)  
into a web of calligrams

stone segments  
open (unraveled)  
in the scrolls by Master Ka'

each with a modest  
thimble whereby  
one appeared  
in pain (the long tassel  
heather blue)  
or in quadrilles of eight  
working parts

(this is an engraving. . . )

also Lopicque's  
razor's edge  
taut and shimmering  
fringe around clouds  
groove-cut  
sorrow drops  
trickle down

like drawers of bits

on laundry carts  
to the jewelry merchant  
art that is to handle them  
by threes along the forearm

rattling skeletons  
already hanging by the  
neck of the alembic


beside the Ursulines  
an exact guillotine of coolies  
pharmacy or five and dime  
of little plumb soldiers  
a legion of Maos

under the equally lead-  
colored sky  
(Mozarabic) land grants  
of an Assisi chapel

next to  
the low ridge that drained  
eastward  
heart's dragon  
from the bugbite movie house returning  
westward (at last)  
in case the axis splintered  
the vase with flowers  
from the rye ergot  
and pomegranate  
forest

how  
in advance of the Great Rebellion  
(the walls)  
tumbling  
like the mouse  
sends China from its burrow  
and up the hill

what do the scrolls  
by Master Ka' betray  
of this matter?  
"but there's no stability  
under the ground we stand  
over inharmonic parts  
we tread"

draining  
(the walls) now  
particles ultra  
broken  
from the sky  
visible:  
the terrain  
full  
but the plane  
flat  
each with a modest  
thimble whereby  
one receded  
in pain (and also  
by pedal)  
the sun  
over ideograms  
but the mouse—bam!—  
now shut into the crate  
which in quadrilles of eight  
we stack one by one 

LLAMADA Y RESPUESTA  
CALL & RESPONSE

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EDITORS' NOTES ∞

For the current issue of *Mandorla*, we submitted a series of questions to five Cuban and Cuban-American poets. Some still live and work on the island of Cuba today, while others reside permanently in the United States or are temporarily living in Europe. The imagined "Cuba" of this project, then, is exploded by individuals and their asymmetrical affiliations. However, the project still presumes that there is a need for community and conversation, asking poets to describe the contours most relevant to their own work with language. We submitted the following questions, in both English and Spanish, to all six writers with a note that they could take up or drop the topics most interesting to them:

\*Certain geographical contexts have been associated with Cuban writing: island, archipelago, diaspora; cityscape, countryside. Are these mappings important to your writing? If so, how?

\*Do economic structures figure into your thinking? If so, what kinds of systems and/or ambiguities, theoretical or experiential, are most present to your writing?

\*What other contexts are most essential to your writing, possibly eclipsing the geographical and economic aspects listed above?

\*How do these different contexts impact your relationship to language, your

understanding of poetry's scope and potential, its work as a relational medium?

\*What debates do you see as the most important for poetry and poetics now? Why?

Each poet's response reflects both resistance and performance. We have made only minimal changes to the formatting and contextual cues that each writer originally chose, because readers may see an intertwining of form and content. For example, some writers gave numbered responses pragmatically matching the order dictated by questions, while others left that order behind and wrote in forms more suggestive of essays or poems, generally tending toward more metaphysical tones.

The choice of language was another framing option, since the call was sent bilingually. All of these poets were raised with the Spanish language, but some have additional fluency in English. It's important to note that their choices of language were not automatically dictated by their geographical locations. Jorge Guitart lives in the United States and chose to respond in English. However, Omar Pérez also responded in English (except for the poem, which Kristin Dykstra translated), but he has only been to the United States once, and just for a week; he has lived most of his life to date on the island. Pérez derives some of his English-language expertise from translation work with British poetry and more recently expanded his use of English in other European contexts, primarily cosmopolitan Amsterdam. Meanwhile, José Kozer, though a long-standing resident of the United States, responded not only in Spanish but in a Spanish deliberately poised on the edge of anacoluthia, grammar that flows from one construction into the next without necessarily completing the obligations of each grammatical element. He includes wordplays in Spanish, and he also makes wordplays visible to a Spanish-speaker who thinks across English, such as the placement of "jugoso" (juicy) and "juicioso" (judicious) next to each other.

Electronic submission is another framing element that affected forms and contents of these commentaries significantly. First of all, e-mail made the call and response project possible, keeping us in touch with writers on the move as well as writers without immediate access to couriers to carry letters to the United States from Cuba (in the absence of a reliable mail system under the embargo). In addition to being convenient, though, e-mail affected the tone and appearance of several responses. Some participants submitted formal-looking responses as attached documents, while others made

use of the more informal messaging style of e-mails among friends. Aroche's and Guitart's brief sentences seemed longer in the condensed visual space of the e-mail programs we used at that time; furthermore, Aroche plays on informality with abbreviations, joking, and references to other conversations. Pérez' terse use of e-space was influenced both by his dislike of certain computer keyboards (on which he types slowly) and his interests in white space and economy of language: his poem, "The Progression," sits among brief commentaries that themselves evoke poetry with short lines and careful spacings.

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## NOTAS EDITORIALES ∞

Algunos poetas que participaron en este proyecto viven y escriben en la isla de Cuba hoy en día; otros se han dispersado a otros lugares. El resultado es que la "Cuba imaginada" de este proyecto podría ser un espacio fragmentado por individuos, por sus asociaciones asimétricas. Pero a la vez, el proyecto propone la necesidad de conceptualizar una comunidad y estructura; pide a los poetas que describan los contornos y curvas más pertinentes a sus propias obras y el lenguaje poético. Les mandamos las preguntas siguientes:

\*Ciertos contextos geográficos han sido asociados con el Caribe: isla, archipiélago, diáspora; paisaje urbano, campo. ¿Son importantes estos mapas metafóricos para su poesía? ¿por qué sí, o no?

\*¿Aparecen estructuras económicas en su pensamiento? ¿Cuáles son los sistemas y/o las ambigüedades, teóricos o empíricos, que más se presentan en su escritura?

\*¿Cuáles son otros contextos importantes para Ud., tal vez eclipsando los temas geográficos y económicos ya tratados?

\*¿Qué efecto tienen estos contextos para su relación con el lenguaje, en su entendimiento del ámbito y del potencial de la poesía, del trabajo que hace la poesía como medio relacional?

\*En su opinión, ¿cuáles son los debates más importantes para la poesía y la poética hoy en día, y por qué?

Las respuestas de cada uno de los poetas reflejan tanto la resistencia como el desempeño. Hemos hecho sólo los cambios más mínimos a las notas contextuales y al formato que

cada poeta escogió originalmente, para que los lectores puedan ver la interconexión entre forma y contenido. Por ejemplo, algunos escritores proporcionaron respuestas enumeradas que corresponden al orden dictado por las preguntas, mientras que otros dejaron el orden a un lado y escribieron en formas que sugieren más un ensayo o poema, generalmente apuntando a lo metafísico más que a lo pragmático.

La escogencia del idioma fue otro marco opcional, dado que la invitación fue bilingüe. Todos estos poetas se criaron con el idioma español, pero algunos tienen fluidez adicional en el inglés. Es importante resaltar que el idioma que los poetas escogieron para responder no fue automáticamente dictado por su situación geográfica. Jorge Guitart vive en los Estados Unidos y escogió responder en inglés. Sin embargo, Omar Pérez también ha respondido en inglés (excepto por el poema que Kristin Dykstra tradujo), pero él ha viajado a Estados Unidos sólo una vez, y permaneció sólo por una semana; él ha pasado la mayor parte de su vida en la isla. Pérez debe parte de su experticia con el inglés a trabajos de traducción de poesía británica y más recientemente expandió su uso del inglés en otros contextos europeos, principalmente en la cosmópolis Amsterdam. Mientras tanto, José Kozer, a pesar de haber residido en los Estados Unidos por un tiempo bastante largo, respondió no sólo en español sino en un español deliberadamente puesto al borde del anacoluto, gramática que fluye de una construcción a otra sin completar necesariamente las obligaciones de cada elemento gramatical. Kozer incluye juegos de palabras en español, y también hace juego de palabras que son visibles a los ojos de un hispanohablante que piensa a través del inglés, como por ejemplo la posición de “jugoso” (*juicy*) y “juicioso” (*judicious*) uno al lado del otro.

La entrega electrónica es otro elemento referencial que afectó considerablemente la forma y el contenido de estos comentarios. En primer lugar, el correo electrónico hizo posible el proyecto de llamada y respuesta, manteniéndonos en contacto con escritores en tránsito—así también como con escritores que no tienen acceso inmediato a un sistema de correo (mensajería) que lleve cartas desde Cuba a los Estados Unidos (ante la ausencia de un sistema de correo confiable bajo el embargo). No obstante, además de ser conveniente, el correo electrónico afectó el tono y la apariencia de varias respuestas. Algunos participantes enviaron respuestas de corte formal como documentos anexos, mientras que otros hicieron uso de un estilo más informal, propio de la correspondencia electrónica utilizada entre amigos. Las oraciones breves de Aroche y Guitart lucen más largas en el espacio visual condensado de los programas

de correo electrónico que utilizamos en ese momento; más aun, Aroche juega con las informalidades al usar abreviaturas, bromas, y referencias a otras conversaciones. El uso conciso que Pérez hace del espacio electrónico fue influenciado por su rechazo a ciertos teclados de computadoras (en los que él escribe lento) y su interés en el espacio blanco y la economía del lenguaje: su poema, “La Progresión,” se ubica entre comentarios breves que evocan poesía con líneas cortas y cuidadosos espacios.

## CARLOS AGUILERA ∞

1. No, no han sido importantes. Quiero decir, como conceptos desde donde haya construído mi escritura o las cagarrutas que así llamo no lo han sido. He intentado que cada uno de mis textos (ficciones de un criminal en conflicto con sus propios métodos) sean hasta donde puedan una reflexión sobre el límite: el límite que separa a un escritor de la Pertenencia, la ilusión de que pertenece o le pertenece algo, el fetiche. A la vez, una caída transversal en eso, en el simulacro de *nos* salida que puede tener un proyecto así. De ahí que algunos de mis poemas y relatos sean difíciles de clasificar como caribeños (a pesar de la tesis intraexpansiva de Benítez Rojo, donde *locaribe* es una especie de tarima que puede ser montada en Berlín o en la India) o *cubanoinsulares* en sentido general. Son textos que pelean duramente con la ley, sobre todo con las que impone violentamente el género literatura-nación, y a la vez son conscientes de su misma fragilidad, de la “reducción” a ratoncitos de novela a que, por esta misma razón, están sometidos.
2. El poder, lo escritural, el autoritarismo y sus performances ridículos y anticiviles. Quizá por haber vivido tanto tiempo en Cuba (aunque no sólo por esto), lugar como sabemos donde el horror y el *karaoke* de estado toman un grado inusual de representación, lo que me obcede –por decirlo de alguna manera– es esa especie de fascismo que todos llevamos dentro, la manera en que se liga a una risita y a una enfermedad, a un delirio. Si en mis poemas esto no se desarrolla como “estructura económica” (que son demasiado caóticos para hablar desfachatadamente de una estructura) estoy seguro que por lo menos con estos conceptos, estas pistas que aquí doy, se podrá seguir el rastro de una economía, algo así como cuando en una quincalla entran unos ladrones y después pueden ser apresados por los montoncitos de baratijas que han dejado a su paso.



3. El de la escritura: un texto, *bricolage* o palabra en forcejeo consigo misma; el de la problematización de la institución literatura y los afectos bobalicones que crea. Estoy seguro que la noción género (tal y como la venden las editoriales) y la literatura como programa (tal y como la enseñan las escuelas) están en crisis, pero eso es precisamente lo que la hace interesante, lo que le ofrece una frontera visible por donde separar lo que asume ciertos riesgos de lo que no. El debate “peligroso” del escritor ha estado siempre en descubrir hasta qué punto puede intentar un diálogo con esta frontera y hasta qué punto ella aceptanega: cómo convertir en problema el lugar común.
  
4. La patria del escritor es el lenguaje, decía Brodsky, y tenía razón. Es el lugar donde todo confluye, donde “el todo” se polemiza, donde determinada actitud construye su hueco. También, el lugar donde lo sacro o reaccionario se hace más evidente. Creo que en hispanoamérica, siquitrillada históricamente por haber llegado tarde a todas partes, están los ejemplos sintomáticos de Roberto Arlt: sus textos a veces parecen una traducción de un manual de checo, de alguien que ha descentrado a la institución y sólo se fija en su núcleo paranoico (Piglia) y el de Lezama, que desquicia el orden-gramática y hace una novela llena de comitas “mal puestas” y anacronismos ilegibles. Estos dos ejemplos bastarían para dar una idea del grado de conflicto que en determinado momento pueden hacer a una escritura compleja; pero tampoco hay que creer demasiado en esto. Lo que debe estar detrás de un poema o relato (creo yo) son conceptos “fuertes”, emblemas que no asuman la culpa de ninguna tradición o archivo anterior, y a la vez construyan su propia línea, su manera propia de leer las tradiciones que funcionan alrededor de la literatura, ésas que se pueden salvar y apuñalear con la misma tijera. Al final, como escribió Shakespeare: La literatura es una perra que hay que echar a la perrera.
  
5. La idea de debate es consustancial al tipo de escritor que uno es o cree ser. Para mí solo tiene sentido el que cuestione todo tipo de centralidad, que abra espacios de diferencia, que no repita. Pienso que la mayoría de las escrituras están atrapadas en las ficciones que el estado quiere que circulen (ésas donde la idea de un público o *intelligentzia* ideal actúan como soborno), en el nacionalismo y en el concepto maniqueo de identidad. Un debate serio supondrá la descanonización de estos conceptos y de las rutas falsas que continuamente lo alimentan: ontología, tradición atávica, modas de uno u

otro tipo... De lo contrario, la cosa no tiene mucho sentido, sería como ayudar a un chino a darle martillazos a un gorrión de hierro.

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1. No, they haven't been important. That is, not as concepts from which I've constructed my writing, or as I call them, my "shit-smears." I've tried to make each of my texts (fictions of a criminal in conflict with his own methods) into a reflection about a limit: the limit that separates an author from Belonging, either the illusion of belonging to something or the illusion that something belongs to oneself, the fetish. At the same time, a transversal fall into this, into the simulacrum of a *no-way-out* that can exist in projects of this kind. As a result some of my poems and tales can be hard to classify as Caribbean (in spite of Benítez-Rojo's intra-expansive thesis, where Caribbeanness is a sort of platform you can set up in Berlin or India), or it's *Cubaninsulars* in a general sense. Mine are texts that fight hard with the law, particularly with laws violently imposed by the nationalist literature genre—and at the same time these texts are conscious of their own fragility, of their potential "reduction," to novelesque mice—a fate to which, for this same reason, they're subjected.
2. Power, the language-law, authoritarianism? and its ridiculous, anti-civil performances. Perhaps because I've lived so long in Cuba (though not only for that reason), a place where, as we know, horror and state *karaoke* reach an unusual level of representation, what obsesses me – to say it somehow – is a sort of fascism that we all carry around inside of us, the way one is bound to light laughter and to an illness, a delirium. If in my poems this does not develop as an "economic structure" (they are too chaotic to speak insolently of a structure), I'm sure that at least with these concepts, these tracks I lay, one could follow the trail of an economy, something like thieves getting into a kiosk; later they can be tracked by the trail of cheap little trinkets they've left behind.
3. That of writing: a text, a *bricolage* or a word locked in struggle with itself; that of a problematization of institutionalized literature and the idiotizing effects that kind of literature creates. I'm sure that the notions of genre (as sold

by publishers) and literature as a program (as taught in schools) are in crisis, but that's exactly what makes them interesting. Crisis offers a visible border to separate writing that assumes certain risks from writing that doesn't. The "dangerous" debate for the author has always been in discovering how far to push a dialogue with that borderline and up to what point the border accepts/rejects: how to transform the common place into a problem.

4. The author's homeland is language, Brodsky said, and he was right. It's the place where everything comes together, where "the all" becomes polemic, where a particular attitude creates a hole. Also, the place where the sacred or the reactionary becomes most evident. I think that in Hispanic America, historically humiliated by having arrived late to all places, are the symptomatic examples of Roberto Arlt: his writings seem at times to be translations of an instruction manual written in an unknown language by someone who has moved away from the institution and only notices his paranoid nucleus (Piglia) and Lezama's, which unhinges grammatical order and writes a novel full of "badly placed" commas and illegible anachronisms. These two examples would suffice to give an idea of the level of conflict that in a given moment make a work complex; but then one need not believe too much in this either. What should be behind a poem or story (I believe) are "strong" concepts, emblems that don't accept responsibility for any prior tradition or archive, which at the same time construct their own lineage, their own way of reading the traditions that operate around literature, the ones that you can save and skewer with the same blade. Ultimately, like Shakespeare wrote: Literature is a dog that you throw to the dogs.
5. The idea of debate is consubstantial with the kind of writer one is or believes oneself to be. For me it only makes sense to question all forms of centrality, to open spaces for difference, to avoid repetition. I think the majority of writings are trapped in the fictions that the state wants to circulate (the ones in which the idea of an audience or ideal intelligentsia act as bribery), in nationalism and in the Manichaean concept of identity. A serious debate would suppose the decanonization of these concepts and of the false paths that continually feed them: ontology, atavistic tradition, literary fashions of one sort or another . . . Otherwise the thing makes no sense; it would be like helping a Chinese man pound on an iron sparrow with a hammer.

1. No, no lo sé. Tampoco me lo planteo. Me gustaría la pulsión, incluso la apropiación de cualquier mapa (o mamma) metafórico dentro de mi poesía. O fluyendo hacia, o fluyendo desde. Pero, y repito, desde. Pero, repito, de ser o no así, es un asunto que no me lo planteo.
2. Las únicas estructuras económicas que pienso he pretendido son las referentes al uso del lenguaje o, y sé que esto suena altanero, la de la sobreabundancia de pensamiento (y del concepto) tamizados quizás por esa misma economía (...) En dos palabras: tratar de decir cada vez más (y supongo que mejor) con cada vez menos.

Y todo hacia una economía del relato poético. Tema este si se quiere para otro momento.

3. Quizás el relato. Quizás, la producción de micro relatos poéticos. O de micro poéticos relatos. Quizás – y en el momento actual- lo urbano. Espacio tratado desde aquello que Cesare Pavese llamara, a propósito de *I Mari del sud*, algo así como lo fantástico objetivo. nada, como se ve nuevo. Borges, Bioy, Cortázar y, un antecedente mejor: *The purloined letter*. Esto es, *La carta robada* de E. A. Poe. Sólo que en mi caso y, luego de estos vastos ejemplos, aplicados a mi poesía si es que puedo y debo hablar así. Faltaría saber, creo y no importa si no me lo preguntas, si esto nos salva. Ante tantos quizás no deben quedar dudas: no yo mismo lo sé.
4. Hablar a estas alturas de salvación? -Bueno, ya está claro que la poesía puede y debe salvarnos. Sólo que primero tiene que ser un hecho en si salvable. Si configuras un organum (si, Aristóteles) estarías configurando algo más que una simple intención. O algo más que un aparato de signos o un instrumento. Un sistema poético. Un aparato de resistencia. una ambición.
5. Muy de acuerdo con un francés de nuestros días... Y el francés dijo: cualquier debate sobre poesía debería atender el poema en sí. Por qué funciona. Por qué no funciona. OJO: la cita que acabo de citar es cita de memoria. Pues bien, del resto pienso y sospecho yo es lo que piensa y sospecha el buen francés rojo como

su vino... es decir, que de resto como, tendencias, grupos, manifiestos y, generaciones, además de un etc. de etc. de etc., se podrían ocupar desde su posición más cómoda historiadores, críticos, y académicos; a fin de mantenerse a buen recaudo, miopes casi siempre todos, o casi todos miopes casi siempre.

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1. No, I don't know. I haven't given the issue any thought either. I'd like to flirt with that idea, appropriating metaphorical maps (or *mamapapas*) for my poetry. Or a flowing toward, or a flowing from. But, I repeat, from. But, I repeat, this being or not being so, is a matter that I haven't even considered.
2. The only economic structures that I think I've toyed with have been ones related to the use of language or, and I know this sounds pretentious, to an overabundance of thought (and concept) sifted, maybe, back through that same economy . . . In brief: to try to say more each time (and I suppose to say it better each time) with less.

And everything moves toward an economy of poetic narrative. A topic for another conversation, if you like.

3. Maybe the narrative. Maybe, the production of poetic micronarratives. Or of micropoetic narratives. Maybe – and at the current moment – the urban. A space treated through what Cesar Pavese might call, in relation to *1 Mari del sud*, something like the objective fantastic. Nothing new, as you see. Borges, Bioy, Cortázar and, a better antecedent: the purloined letter, Poe's stolen letter. Only applied to my case. And, following these broad examples, applied to my poetry if I can and should talk like that. One would need to know, I think, and it doesn't matter if you don't ask me, whether this can save us. In the face of so many maybes there should be no more doubt: not even I myself know the answer.
4. Talking at this point in time about salvation? —ok, it's already clear that poetry can and should save us. But first it has to be an act in itself capable of salvation. If you configure organum (yes, Aristotle) you'd be configuring something more than a simple intention. Something more than a sign

apparatus or an instrument. A poetic system. An apparatus of resistance. An ambition.

5. Very much in agreement with a Frenchman of our time . . . And the Frenchman said: any debate over poetry should attend to the poem itself. Why it works. Why it doesn't. I've just quoted from memory, maybe misquoting. So ok, what I think and suspect about the rest is what the good Frenchman, red as his wine, thinks and suspects . . . that all the rest of that stuff like tendencies, groups, manifestos and generations, plus an etc. of etc. of etc., are best left to the historians, critics, and academics; who speak from their safe places, all of them almost always myopic, or almost all of them myopic almost always.

### CARIDAD ATENCIO: "Nubes dentro" ∞

La isla ya estaba en la respiración. Esto ya lo dijo alguien. Siempre pienso en cómo se articulan las diversas aristas: físicas, metafísicas, contextuales. Pienso en la tiranía del sitio, ése, sobre el que nos levantamos y a la vez no nos deja crecer. Así arranque y contención nos desubican en el sueño.

En alguna parte dije, y referido a otro poeta, sesión que no me libra, que se perciben vallas en el entramado social donde la filosofía popular es igual al juicio, el juicio a la costumbre, la costumbre a la aspiración y ésta se limita al submundo económico. El escritor siempre describe un orden y propone otro, o los presenta en lucha allí donde se confunden sistemas y ambigüedades. La multidimensión, la vida ubicua te van cercando.

De la relación con el lenguaje ya he tratado en un libro, donde reclamo la condición de núcleo del entramado literario, cualquiera que fuese su dimensión: "El estallido y su nulidad en la pregunta. El estallido y su nulidad / tergiversación / en la respuesta". Así "Un libro—para mí, hecho por mí—" es "el viaje de la conciencia por un estado". Fibra que se deshila o hilo que se desfibra. O sustantivas adjetivaciones. Cripta con vista al cielo: la reducción y abuso de la foto.

La poesía esconde la mitad que quiere entregar. En ese forcejeo se autoasombra y comienza de nuevo el viaje, el estallido. Presuponer un tejido, un entramado

precidido de, en cierta forma, movible cuestionamientos es, a lo menos, un esfuerzo imposible. Como dejamos nuestra huella perdida en cada tránsito, en todo lo que hemos escrito se divisan estas líneas y sus atenuantes. Con preguntar ya se han organizado las respuestas.

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The island was already breathing inside us. Someone said that. I always think about how its different intersecting ridges are articulated: physical, metaphysical, contextual. I think about the tyranny of place, the site where we are raised but which refuses to let us grow. Then the shoving and contention displace us into limbo.

Somewhere I said, referring to another poet, in a conversation that still haunts me, that obstacles become apparent in the social fabric where popular philosophy equals judgment, and judgment custom, and custom aspiration, and this aspiration remains limited to the economic subworld. The writer always describes one order and proposes another, or presents them locked in battle there, where systems and ambiguities mix confusedly. Multidimension and life, ubiquitous, close in on you.

I've written about my relationship to language in a book, where I demand that language be recognized as the armature of literary constructions, whatever their dimensions may be: "The explosion and its nullification via the question. The explosion and its nullification / distortion / via the response." So "a book—for me, made by me—" is "the voyage of consciousness through a state." Fiber that comes unthreaded, or a thread that comes unwound. Or adjectives piling up into nouns. Crypt with a view of the sky: reduction and abuse of the photograph.

Poetry hides half of what it wants to give. In this struggle, it surprises itself and begins all over again, the explosion. It's impossible to presuppose an armature, a predecided context that, in some way, will guide flexible questioning. As we leave our tracks lost in every transit, these lines and their implications can be glimpsed in the distance, in everything we write. By setting up a question, one has already structured the responses.

My poetry writing in English has no conscious connection with my having lived in Cuba for the first 24 years of my life. I don't feel part of a diaspora; I have never felt like an exile. It is not anybody's fault.

I am a bourgeois who writes to entertain myself and others.

Most essential to my writing is reading other poets who are not committed to transparency or anecdote or moral intensity or a higher reality or the chronicling of personal crises. Among most positive influences I would list José Kozer, Reina María Rodríguez, John Ashbery, Lyn Hejinian, Leslie Scalapino, and Michael Palmer.

My relationship to language is extremely optimistic, because being a generative linguist I am convinced that there are infinite possibilities for totally novel utterances. Just about anything we say has never been said before and yet we understand one another thanks to grammars we share. Communication is the norm and though a lot of it is uninteresting, some of it is worth saving and enshrining.

I am not aware of any interesting debates going on at the present time. I would like to see debates regarding what poetry is and what it is for in the context of U.S. society. I would like to see challenges to the mainstream positions reaching the general public. These challenges could be in the areas of dissemination and its control (who gets to publish and who decides), rewards and their control (who gets the grants and who decides), and education (how poetry should be taught, what kind of poetry should be taught, where, when).

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El que yo escriba poesía en inglés no está conectado de modo consciente con el hecho de que viví en Cuba los primeros 24 años de mi vida. No me siento parte de una diáspora ni nunca me he sentido exiliado. La culpa no es de nadie.

Soy un burgués que escribe para entretenerse a sí mismo y a otros.



Lo más esencial para lo que escribo es leer otros poetas que no están comprometidos con la transparencia, la anécdota, la intensidad moral, una realidad superior, o la crónica de crisis personales. Entre las influencias más positivas mencionaría a José Kozer, Reina María Rodríguez, John Ashbery, Lyn Hejinian, Leslie Scalapino, y Michael Palmer.

Mi relación con el lenguaje es extremadamente optimista porque siendo un lingüista generativo estoy convencido que hay infinitas posibilidades para expresiones totalmente novedosas. Casi nada de lo que decimos ha sido dicho anteriormente, y sin embargo nos entendemos mutuamente gracias a las gramáticas que compartimos. Lo normal es que nos comuniquemos y aunque buena parte de lo que nos decimos carece de interés, hay cosas que valen la pena preservar e inclusive venerar.

No estoy consciente de ningún debate interesante que se esté sucediendo actualmente. Me gustaría ver debates sobre lo que es la poesía y para qué sirve en el contexto de la sociedad estadounidense. Me gustaría que hubiera retos a la poética oficial dominante que llegaran al conocimiento del público. Estos retos pudieran ser en las áreas de difusión y de su control (a quién se publica y quién lo decide), premiación (quién recibe apoyo económico y quién lo decide), y educación (cómo debe enseñarse la poesía, qué clase de poesía debe enseñarse, dónde, cuándo).

## JOSÉ KOZER ∞

Un poema contiene referencialidad (todo contiene referencialidad: el mismo vacío es referencia de sí en su Nada): esa referencialidad, compleja, polivalente, inestable, hecha de rápidas mutaciones y de ovídicos reflejos, proteicas refracciones, constituye de algún modo la carne más externa del poema: las capas más interiores, al adentrarnos, forjan un “inscape” (que diría Manley Hopkins): “inscape” que me interesa más que las cáscaras superpuestas del exterior del poema.

¿Por qué? La respuesta es sencilla: moviéndose hacia el “inscape” el lenguaje se sobresalta de desconocimiento, se azora y se vuelve inaudito: ese camino

torcido, meándrico, hacia el fondo (¿astral?) (¿microscópico?) está minado, carece de placidez o de sólida plataforma: cada vez que damos un paso tememos empantanarnos, vernos obligados a regresar, o ahogarnos en un limo quizás fétido, quizás fragante, del que no se vuelve ya. Y ese riesgo, a través de los retorcimientos y limpideces del lenguaje, es el que un poeta debe correr: no hay otro recorrido.

Un recorrido dantesco pero a la vez el recorrido de los poetas que en realidad han tenido algo que decir o han hecho del fango, oro; y de la pestilencia, belleza. Y viceversa. Lo han hecho, no mediante elucubraciones políticas, panfletarias, descriptivas, económicas, sino mediante una ceguera de lenguaje que los llevó a enfangarse, lanzándose desde una altura rumbo a los bajos fondos del desconocimiento, de (quizás) la mayor cantidad posible (y permitida) de irrealidad.

Si algo caracteriza mi trabajo (en principio sólo hago poemas) es la fuerte necesidad de hacer poesía casi a diario (en los últimos treinta años he escrito un poema cada 2.65 días): esa tenacidad se asemeja a la del compositor, a la del pintor, “operarios” que trabajan todos los días, y sin descanso. ¿Por qué no iba a hacerlo el poeta? No es que me haya propuesto nada pero (y sin emular) he necesitado escribir poemas como el feligrés que va a diario a rezar o el músico que practica un instrumento todos los días: el poeta en cuanto “artesano” y “practicante” (ejecutante) y no en cuanto “genio” y vehículo de altas musas, inspiradores dioses (y diosas) y demás verracadas.

Esta continuidad, esta consistencia, debo decirlo, a mí mismo me resulta insólita: la acepto, eso es todo. Hago un trabajo estructurado por formas diversas que va del verso minimalista al exacerbado verso “neobarroco” de presencia interminable, extensa hechura. Se trata de una poesía tendiente a la fragmentación, al atomismo, a la creación (recuperación) de vacíos: lo entrecortado disímil, frágil, y en gran medida fallido: lenguaje no acendrado de diccionario sino lenguaje que se retuerce en sí mismo, contra sí, a la espera: ¿de qué? No se sabe, no lo sabe, no lo sé.

Sin embargo, de algún modo oscuro confío en su munificencia, su índole generosa, su capacidad de fructificar desde una continuidad hurgando,

rebuscando en la fronda del desconocimiento: variando y desvariando. Un lenguaje, en mi caso, parentético, cuajado de anacolutos, de excrecencias, de referencialidad múltiple, engañosa, quebradiza: vidrio trizándose, recomponiéndose. Procura ese lenguaje a través del poema alcanzar fijaciones límpidas, perentorias (sé que son efímeras): una temporalidad jugosa, no juiciosa; unas aclaraciones (turbias, claro está) que trillan, criban, recogen (se recogen) desde el zen, desde una diversidad de orígenes, forjando un palimpsesto diaspórico que converge y se nutre de la llamada Modernidad.

Espiritualidad: justo aquélla que no descarta el cuerpo, la masa viva de la materia, el agujero lleno del temblor celular: el poema en cuanto microorganismo, en cuanto astralidad reverberando microorganicidad. Una poesía que comparte trópicos (laurel de Indias) y nortes (abetos, abedules): una poesía que se distiende al compás de los calores, las gélidas atmósferas de la vida cotidiana, la seriedad jocosa de las relaciones humanas, la incertidumbre de la muerte, su arraigo necesario e insoslayable. ¿Qué hacer? ¿Qué hacer ante la muerte sino escribir? Y escribir todo cuanto se puede: y más. Escribir a la manera del artesano que hace vasijas, ser uno mismo vasija porosa en manos del artesano dándole vueltas al torno, torno él mismo de su propio torno: de su propio tras/torno. Poesía, apuesta de vida; apuesta no a favor ni en nombre de una nación, una ideología, un sistema económico, una univocidad: apuesta que no se dirige a la pureza como paradigma: pureza tampoco pues poco me interesa en puridad lo paradigmático: la incertidumbre sí; y mucha: ésa para mí, sin duda, gran fuente de creación.

De la incertidumbre todo germina. Y cuaja.

Amo el texto denso, descarnado de oropel: el texto no coqueto, no seductor. Amo del texto denso sus zonas lúbricas, sus zonas de inquietante sensualidad: amo sus espacios insoportables, farragosos, complicados en exceso, innecesariamente complicados. Su respirar miasmas. Su afán de espaciosidad. La densidad de lenguaje explora superficies que de otra manera permanecerían sin hollar, sin ensuciar por la mancha humana, la mano del tañedor y del teñidor: ese lenguaje reptaba en direcciones inesperadas, insoportables muchas veces; direcciones que hacen temblar la mano, enrarecen el hálito, lo perfuman de la fetidez del subsuelo o de la impenetrable oscuridad más allá de los espacios cercanos del lejano cielo.

El recorrido del lenguaje poético denso deja por donde pasa agujeros: tiene que retroceder para llenarlos, y al hacerlo crea (construye) nuevos agujeros que tendrá que volver a llenar: estero y meandro, laguna límpida y ciénaga, raíz aérea y adventicia o rizoma fue movimiento, el lenguaje denso reptá, transcurre de orificio en orificio penetrando capas y más capas superpuestas de materia y de quedad: ramificaciones que va alterando o reconociendo, reconociéndolas para encontrar aspectos desconocidos que proceden de la creación de los demás creadores, Dios incluido.

Una vida haciendo poemas, una inversión: soy en efecto un invertido, un "raro" que diría Darío. Me he pasado todos los días de mi existencia ahuyentando mil posibilidades, sus facilismos, para poder intuir malamente, vagamente, algo concatenado más allá del conocimiento evidente, algo que (por aludir a San Agustín) carece de scientia y procura sapientia.

Carezco, qué duda me cabe, de sabiduría: pero haber dedicado una vida a hacer poemas me ha dado, desde la inquietud, un raro saber: el de la noción de que hay sabiduría y de que, inasequible (al menos para mí), ésta yace y subyace en el lenguaje poroso, liberado, que se enreda y desenreda en poemas (poemas embrollos) (miles de poemas) para intentar dejar ahí depósitos de verdad, depósitos de belleza: yo no sé si algunos de mis poemas contienen, aunque sea parcialmente, algo de esa belleza o de esa verdad: sólo puedo decir que, de la mano del lenguaje, he hecho durante toda una vida una serie de poemas que sin aspirar a nada de particular, de un modo oscuro, han aspirado a dejar secuela de luz, el júbilo de la luz antes de oscurecerse.

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A poem contains referentiality (everything contains referentiality: the void itself is self-referential in its Nothingness): that referentiality, complex, polyvalent, unstable, made of rapid mutations and Ovidian reflections, protean refraction, in some way constitutes the most external flesh of the poem: the most interior layers, as we move inward, generate "inscape" (as Manley Hopkins would say): an "inscape" that interests me more than the shells imposed by the poem's exterior.

Why? The answer is simple: moving toward “inscape,” language starts out of the unknown, becomes astonished, then outrageous: that twisted path meandering toward the center (astral? microscopic?) is undermined, lacking stability or support: with every step, we’re scared of sinking down into it, of seeing ourselves obliged to turn back, or of drowning in fetid or fragrant slime, something from which there’s no return. And that risk of running through the twists and clarities of language is the risk that a poet has to run: there’s no other option.

A Dantean journey but also the one made by poets who really have had something to say, who have made gold out of mud and beauty out of pestilence. And vice versa. They’ve done it—not through political, pamphleteering, descriptive, economic lucubrations but through a linguistic blindness that drove them toward troubling language, dropping from the heights into depths of unknowingness, maybe into the greatest possible (and permissible) degree of unreality.

If anything characterizes my work (for the most part, I only make poems) it’s the strong need to make poetry on a more or less daily basis (in the past thirty years, I’ve written a poem every 2.65 days): this tenacity resembles that of the composer, the painter, “laborers” who work every day and without rest. Why wouldn’t a poet do the same? It’s not that I planned anything but that I (not emulating anyone) have needed to write poems, like a parishioner who prays every day or a musician who practices daily: the poet as “artisan” and “practitioner” (maker) and not as “genius,” not as the vehicle of higher muses, not inspired by gods (and goddesses), none of that garbage.

This continuity, this consistency I should say, seems bizarre even to me: I just accept it. I make work in diverse forms ranging from minimalist verse to an exaggerated “neo-baroque” line of unending presence, an extended workmanship. It’s about a poetry tending toward fragmentation, atomization, the creation (recovery) of voids: dissimilarity interrupted, fragile, and in great measure failed: not a language purified via the dictionary but a language that winds around itself, against itself, awaiting: what? You don’t know, it doesn’t know, I don’t know.

Nonetheless, in some incomprehensible way I trust in its munificence, its generosity, its capacity to fructify a continuity that stirs, that gleams from the foliage of the unknown: varied, raving speech. In my case, a language that is parenthetical, laden with anacoluthia, with excrescence; with deceitful, brittle, multiple referentiality: a pane of glass shattered into small parts and recomposing. Through the poem, that language attempts to achieve clean, peremptory moorings (I know these securities are ephemeral): a pithy temporality, juicy and not judicious; some explanations (muddy ones, as you can clearly see) that thresh out, sift, gather (gather themselves) from zen, from a diversity of origins, forging a diasporic palimpsest that converges and feeds on the thing we call Modernity.

Spirituality: the thing that specifically does not leave the body behind, the living material mass, an emptiness filled by cellular vibration: the poem at once microorganism and constellation. A poetry that conflates the tropics (Cuban laurel) with the northern regions (firs, birches): a poetry that distends with the rhythms of warm temperatures, frozen atmospheres lived daily, with the comic seriousness of human relations, the uncertainty of death, its necessary and inevitable rootedness. What do you do – what do you do in the face of death, but write? And write as much as possible, and more. Write like a craftsman throwing a pot, become the clay in the hands of the craftsman who turns the wheel, who turns himself on the wheel: his own overthrow. Poetry, a wager on life; a gamble made not for or in the name of a nation, an ideology, an economic system, a univocality: a wager not directed toward purity as a paradigm: not toward purity itself either, because that doesn't interest me as a paradigm: instead, it's the uncertainty that interests me, and very much: for me, uncertainty is the source of all creativity.

Out of uncertainty everything germinates. And comes to fruition.

I love dense text, lean and stripped of false veneers: text that is neither flirtatious nor seductive. I love its erogenous zones, the disquieting sensuality of dense text. I love the difficulty of grasping certain places, its convolution, its complications in the extreme, its unnecessary complications. Its miasmic breathing. Its spatial passion. The density of language explores surfaces that (done some other way) would remain trackless, untainted by man, its string

not plucked by the hand of the musician, its cloth not dyed: that language slithers in unexpected directions, often incomprehensible; in directions that make one's hand shake, that leave one breathless, language perfumed with the stench of subsoil or the impenetrable darkness lying beyond those closer spaces we see as the distant sky.

The motion of dense poetic language leaves holes as it goes: it has to retreat to fill them up, and in doing that, it creates new holes that it will have to go back and fill in turn: swamp and river's meander, marsh and clear pond, aerial and adventitious roots, or a rhizome of unexpected movement, dense language slithers, it flows from orifice to orifice, penetrating layers and more superimposed layers of matter and of emptiness: dense language shifts its ramifications or recognizes them, unknown aspects emerging from the creations of other creators, the divine included.

A life of making poems, an investment: I am in effect an invested person, an "eccentric," as Darío would say. I've spent each day of my existence dismissing a thousand possibilities, their easy ways out, in order to barely, vaguely intuit some chain forming out there beyond visible knowledge, something that (here I allude to St. Augustine) lacks in *scientia* and gains in *sapientia*.

I lack in wisdom, and I have no doubt about that: but dedicating a life to the making of poems has given me, out of my inquietude, a strange way of knowing: one founded on the notion that there is wisdom and that incomprehensible (at least for me) wisdom lies in porous, liberated language that winds and unwinds in poems (intricate poems) (thousands of poems), hoping to leave behind deposits of truth, deposits of beauty: I don't know if any of my poems contain, even partially, any of that truth or beauty: all I can say is that through the labor of language, I've made a series of poems that aspire to nothing in particular, and in some obscure way did aspire to leave behind remnants of light, the jubilation of light before darkness.

Number One, I considered as already answered.

Number Two, only once, that I know, I dealt with that.  
It's in a poem: "The Progression" (from *Gato de Pelea*).

### The Progression

When one isn't enough, you need two  
when two aren't enough, you need four  
with four the progression begins, moving toward a number  
that schoolteachers will call absurd.

Question: How many men do you need  
to put up a house?

Answer: You need absurd men  
when one isn't enough and two can't do  
the work of One.

And how much money should we give these men  
to compensate them?

You need absurd coins when one coin  
sliced in half and handed out  
isn't enough.

And how many words do you need to  
transform them?

Absurd and absurd and absurd words  
when silence isn't enough.

This is what they call the progression:  
Absurd men aren't enough for putting up the house,  
absurd coins don't make them happy  
absurd words can't dissuade them.

Number Three, every context is important in its due  
time. Each poem has its own context. And every poem  
is, in itself, part of a certain context. The rest is  
analysis.

Number Four, winter in winter, spring in spring, and  
all the rest. Do we really know that poetry is  
relational?



Debates? It's enough to know that poetry exists before and beyond language and I. The rest is debatable.

Love,  
Omar

The other day in the woods I saw a squirrel. She, or he, saw me. And mumbled. You know.

\*\*

Número uno, la considero ya respondida.

Número dos, sólo una vez, que yo sepa, traté el tema. Fue en un poema: "La Progresión" (*Gato de Pelea*).

### La progresión

Cuando no basta uno, dos son necesarios  
cuando no bastan dos, cuatro son necesarios  
cuatro inician la progresión hacia un número  
al cual llaman absurdo en las escuelas.

Pregunta: ¿Cuántos hombres son necesarios  
para levantar una casa?

Respuesta: Absurdos hombres son precisos  
cuanto uno no basta y dos no logran  
hacer el trabajo de Uno.

Y a esos hombres ¿cuántas monedas  
daremos para retribuirlos?

Absurdas monedas son precisas cuando una  
partida a la mitad y repartida  
no basta.

¿Y cuántas palabras se necesitan para  
transformarlos?

Absurdas y absurdas y absurdas palabras son precisas  
cuando el silencio no basta.

Es esto lo que llaman progresión:

Absurdos hombres no bastan para levantar la casa  
ni absurdas monedas para contentarlos  
ni absurdas palabras para disuadirlos.


Número tres, cada contexto es importante a su debido tiempo. Cada poema tiene su propio contexto. Y cada poema es, en si mismo, parte de un contexto determinado. El resto es análisis.

Número cuatro, invierno en invierno, primavera en primavera, y todo lo demás. ¿Realmente sabemos que la poesía es relacional?

¿Debates? Es suficiente saber que la poesía existe antes y más allá del lenguaje y la escritura. Lo demás es discutible.

Con cariño,

Omar

El otro día en el bosque vi una ardilla. Ella, o él, me vió. Y murmuró. Tú sabes. 

*Call & Response Project Translated by Henry Lezama and Kristin Dykstra  
with James Pancrazio & Comments from Contributors*

COLABORADORES  
CONTRIBUTORS

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**Eleni Sikelianos** (E.E.U.U.) ha publicado los libros *Earliest Worlds* (2001), *The Book of Tendons* (1997), y *To Speak While Dreaming* (1993); los textos incluidos en este número forman parte de *Earliest Worlds*. • Translator and poet **Gabriel Bernal Granados** (Mexico) has published the poetry collections *Simulaciones* and *De persiana que se abre*. More recent is his book of prose, *Historia natural de uno mismo*. • **Jay Wright** (U.S.) has written numerous volumes of poetry, the most recent being *Transfigurations: Collected Poems* (Louisiana State University Press, 2000), *Boleros* (1991), *Selected Poems of Jay Wright* (1987), and *Elaine's Book* (1986). • **Vera M. Kutzinski** es profesora de Inglés, Estudios Africano-Americanos y Americanos en la universidad de Yale. Sus libros incluyen *Against the American Grain* (1987) y *Sugar's Secrets* (1993); su ensayo en este número forma parte de *Against the American Grain*. Actualmente escribe un libro que se trata de Langston Hughes en las Américas. • **Roberto González Echevarría** es *Sterling Professor* de Español, Portugués y Literatura Comparativa en la Universidad de Yale. Ha escrito extensamente sobre la literatura hispanoamericana; sus libros incluyen *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (1977), *The Novel as Myth and Archive* (1990), y *Celestina's Brood* (1993). • Cuban poet **Carlos Aguilera's** books include *Das Kapital* (1996) and *Retrato de A. Hooper y su esposa* (1995), as well as the chapbook *Tipologías*. • **Todd Ramón Ochoa** (U.S.) is an ethnographer and translator who has lived and studied extensively in Havana. • **Paul Vanouse** (U.S.) has shown work in many different cities around the world, including Havana, Buenos Aires, and Madrid; the art in this issue appeared in *Gene(sis)* at the Henry Art

Gallery, Seattle, WA. • **Julio Trujillo** nació en la ciudad de México en 1969. Tiene publicados los libros de poesía *Una sangre y Proa*. Es jefe de redacción de *Letras libres*.

- Articles by **Jacqueline Loss** (U.S.) have appeared in *Nepantla: Views from South, Latino and Latina Writers*, and *CR: The New Centennial Review*, among other publications. Her forthcoming projects include a co-edited collection of contemporary Cuban short fiction in translation (Northwestern UP, 2005) and a manuscript on cosmopolitanisms entitled *Against the Destiny of Place*.
- Cuban poet **José Kozer** has been living in the United States since 1960; his many books include *Anima* (2002), *Mezcla para dos tiempos* (1999), *Carece de causa* (1988), *Bajo este cien* (1983), and others.
- **Mark Weiss** (U.S.) has published five books of poetry and coedited, with Harry Polkinhorn, the anthology *Across the Line/Al otro lado: The Poetry of Baja California*; forthcoming are *Stet: Selected Poems of José Kozer* (2004) and *The Whole Island/La isla en peso: Six Decades of Cuban Poetry* (2005).
- Los libros más recientes de **Tamara Kamenszain** incluyen *El ghetto* (Editorial Sudamericana, 2003), *Tango Bar* (Ed. Sudamericana de Buenos Aires [impreso en Barcelona], 1998), e *Historias de amor: y otros ensayos sobre poesía* (Paidós, 2000).
- Poet **Gabriel Gudding's** *A Defense of Poetry* (2002) won the Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize; his work has appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *VeRT*, *Fence*, *Jacket*, and many other journals.
- Poet, journalist, and diplomat **Rubén Darío** (Nicaragua, 1867-1916) is known for his innovative writing in *Prosas profanas y otros poemas*, *Cantos de vida y esperanza*, *El canto errante*, and other publications.
- **Paul Hoover** (E.E.U.U.) ha publicado *Fables of Representation* (2004), *Winter (Mirror)* (2002), *Rehearsal in Black* (2001), y otros libros; los textos incluidos en este número forman parte de *Winter(Mirror)*.
- Books by poet, translator, and essayist **Omar Pérez** (Cuba) include *Algo de lo sagrado* (1995), *¿Oíste hablar del gato de pelea?* (1998), *La perseverancia de un hombre oscuro* (2000), and *Canciones y Letanías* (2002); poems appear in *Diario de Poesía*, *boundary 2*, and other journals.
- Poet **Javier Marimón** (Cuba) has published *Formas de llamar desde Los Pinos* (2000), *El Gran Lunes* (2000), *La muerte de Eleanor* (1998), and other collections.
- Forthcoming translations by **Rosa Alcalá** will appear in *500 Years of Latin American Poetry* (Oxford UP) and *Bestiary: The Selected Poems of Lourdes Vázquez* (Bilingual Review/Press). She is the author of *Some Maritime Disasters This Century* (2003) and is currently editing *SPIT TEMPLE: Cecilia Vicuña & the Performance of Poetry* (Coach House Press).
- **Elizabeth Hatmaker's** (U.S.) poetry has appeared in *Epoch*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Bird Dog*, and *Mississippi Review*; her current project explores the "Black Dahlia," a famous murder victim of the 1940s, and her subliminal intersection between the noir tradition and "true crime."
- **Reynaldo Jiménez** nació en Lima, Perú (1959), pero

desde muy chico se fue a vivir a Argentina, donde escribe y coordina la revista y la editorial *tsé-tsé*. Es autor de la antología de poetas peruanos del siglo xx, *El libro de unos sonidos*. Sus libros más recientes son *La reflexión esponja* y *Musgo*. • **Nathaniel Mackey's** (U.S.) most recent books include *Whatsaid Serif* (poetry, 1998); *Song of the Andoumboulou: 18-20* (poetry, 1994); *School of Udhra* (poetry, 1993); *Djbot Baghostus's Run* (prose, 1993); and *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing* (criticism, 1993). • The poem by **José Lezama Lima** (Cuba, 1912-1976)—perhaps the key figure among the second generation of Latin American Modernists—is taken from his posthumous collection *Fragmentos a su imán*. • **Roberto Tejada** (U.S.) is the author of *Mexico/New York* (Ediciones RM, D.A.P, 2003) and *Manuel Álvarez Bravo: In Focus* (Getty Publications, 2001). His translations of the poetry of José Lezama Lima are forthcoming in a selected edition published by the University of California Press, 2004. • **Alfonso D'Aquino** (Ciudad de México, 1959) ha publicado los libros de poesía *Prosfisia*, *piedra no piedra*, *Tanagra*, *Naranja verde*, *Basilisco* y *Víbora breve*, entre otros. • **Kristin Dykstra** (U.S.) co-translated Reina María Rodríguez' forthcoming anthology from Green Integer Press. Her translations and interviews have appeared in *A.bacus*, *How 2: Non-traditional Directions in Poetry and Scholarship by Women*, *boundary 2*, *Actual: Revista Literaria*, two Factory School projects, and other publications. • **Jaime Saenz** (Bolivia, 1921-1986) lived and worked in La Paz. The poetry in this issue is taken from a new translation of his longest poem, *The Night* (1984). • Translators and poets **Forrest Gander** and **Kent Johnson** (U.S.) won the PEN translation award for their earlier book, *Immanent Visitor: Selected Poems of Jaime Saenz*; they describe Saenz as “apocalyptic and occult in his politics, . . . insistently nocturnal in his artistic affairs.” • **Thad Ziolkowski** (U.S.) is the author of the collection of poetry, *Our Son, The Arson* (What Books, 1996) and the memoir of a surfer youth, *On a Wave* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 2002). His art criticism and other writings have been published in the *Village Voice* and *Artforum*. • **Magali Tercero** is a widely published poet, cultural journalist, and art writer based in Mexico City. She has authored essays to various catalogues and has published in *La jornada*, *Unomasmuno*, and *Artes de México*, among others. • Cuban poet **Reina María Rodríguez** has published eight books of poetry, among them *La foto del invernadero* (1998), the anthology *Ellas escriben cartas de amor* (1998), and *Páramos* (1993); her bilingual anthology, *Violet Island and Other Poems*, is forthcoming from Green Integer Press. She currently edits the magazine *Azoteas* in Havana. • **Nancy Gates Madsen** holds a Ph.D. in Spanish from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and co-translated *Violet Island and Other Poems*. • **Peter O'Leary** (U.S.) has written a

book of poetry, *Watchfulness* (Spuyten Duyvil, 2001), and a book of criticism, *Gnostic Contagion: Robert Duncan & the Poetry of Illness* (Wesleyan, 2002). • **Ana Rosa González Matute** (ciudad de México) recientemente terminó su traducción de *My Emily Dickinson* de Susan Howe, y muy pronto aparecerá su antología en español de cuentos de Lydia Davis. Ha publicado los libros de poemas *Hipoglomusa*, *Estrías* y *Silogismo del alba*. • The latest published books by **Antonio José Ponte** (Matanzas, Cuba, 1964) are *Tales from the Cuban Empire*, translated by Cola Franzen (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2002), *El libro perdido de los origenistas* (México City: Aldus, 2002) and the novel *Contrabando de sombras* (Barcelona: Mondadori, 2002). • **Mark Schafer** (U.S.) is a literary translator and a visual artist who works with maps. *Meaning to Eat*, his translation of Antonio José Ponte's collection of essays *Las comidas profundas*, has yet to find a publisher. His translation of *Migraciones* by the Mexican poet Gloria Gervitz will be published in September 2004 by Junction Press. • **Curtis White's** (U.S.) most recent books include *Requiem* (2001), *Memories of My Father Watching T.V.* (1998), *Monstrous Possibility* (1998), *Anarcho-Hindu* (1995), and *The Idea of Home* (1992). The selection included in this issue is taken from *America's Magic Mountain*, forthcoming from Dalkey Archive Press. • **Soleida Ríos** (Santiago de Cuba, 1950; resident in Havana) has published an anthology of Cuban woman poets, four poetry collections, and *El texto sucio* (1999), from which the present selection is drawn. *El texto sucio* is scheduled for publication, in a translation by Barbara Jamison, by City Lights Press. • **Jorge Guitart** (U.S.) is preparing a bilingual volume of new and selected poems, *No Soy Sauce & a Willow I'm Not: Poems of a Divided Imagination*. He teaches Spanish linguistics at SUNY Buffalo and is the author of *Foreigner's Notebook* (Shuffaloff 1993) and *Film Blanc* (Meow Press 1996). • **Kass Fleisher** (U.S.) is the author of *The Bear River Massacre and the Making of History* (SUNY Press 2004) and *Accidental Species: A Reproduction* (Chax Press, forthcoming). • New media artist **Caroline Koebel's** recent shows in the U.S. and abroad include *Film Kitchen*, *Sniff Out Laws*, *Pupspindanceslow*, *Fertilitate*, and others; her latest critical essays appear in *Art Papers*, *Dialogue*, and *Wide Angle*. • Poetry by **Joel Bettridge** (U.S.) can be found in *Colorado Review*, *Cypress*, and *Phylum Press: A Micro Anthology*; his critical essays appear in *Jacket*, *Sagetrieb*, *Pynchon Notes*, and *Chicago Review*; and he is the co-editor of *Ronald Johnson: Life and Work*, forthcoming from the National Poetry Foundation. • **Susan Briante** (U.S.) is the author of the chapbooks *True to Scale* (Phylum Press 2001) and *Neotropics: A Romance in Field Notes* (Belladonna\* Press 2003). An essayist and translator, she is the assistant director of creative writing at the University of Texas at Austin. • **Arnaldo Valero** (Venezuela) is a member of the small-press

publishing collective El Círculo Rojo and the author of *Nación y transculturación* (2003). His essay in this issue of *Mandorla* was originally published in Spanish by the *Revista del Centro de Actividades Literarias José Antonio Ramos Sucre* (December 2000).

- Translator **Henry Lezama** (Venezuela) has studied in the United States and teaches at the Universidad de Oriente (Sucre); his most recent project is the translation of Venezuelan Tío Conejo folktales.
- **Nick Lawrence** (U.S.) is author of *Timeserver* (1996), editor of *Chloroform*, and co-founder of the Common/wealth Theater Collaborative; his poetry and prose have appeared in *Grand Street*, *Talisman*, *Object*, *Lyric&*, *Mirage*, *Xcp*, and *Ecopoetics*, among other magazines.
- **Pedro Marqués de Armas** (Cuba) is the author of *Fondo de ojo* (Editorial Abril, 1988), *Los altos manicomios* (Editorial Abril, 1993), *Cabezas* (Editorial Unión, 2002), and *Fascículos sobre Lezama* (Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1994).
- **Rito Aroche** (Cuba) has won a variety of prizes for his poetry collections; Ediciones Unión released the second installment of *Cuasi*, Aroche's fourth book, in 2002.
- **Caridad Atencio** (Cuba) has published many books of literary criticism and poetry, including the recent collections *Los cursos imantados* (2000) and *Salinas para el potro* (2001). ☒





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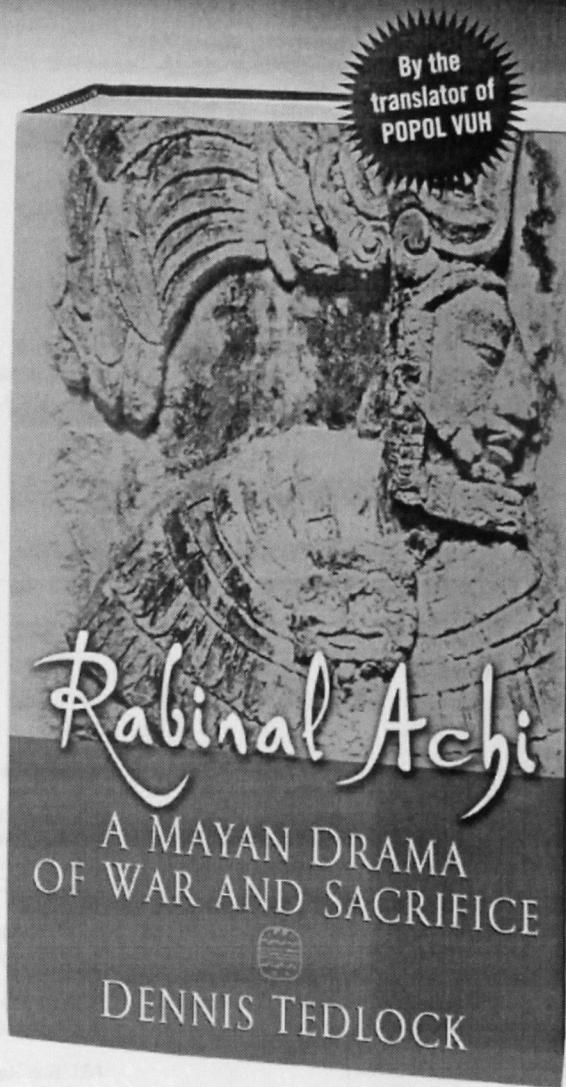
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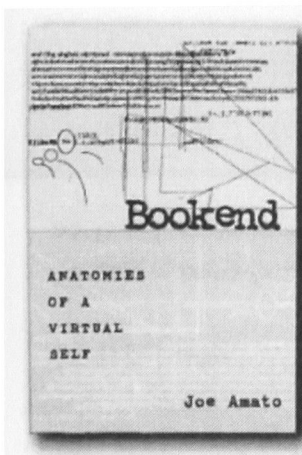
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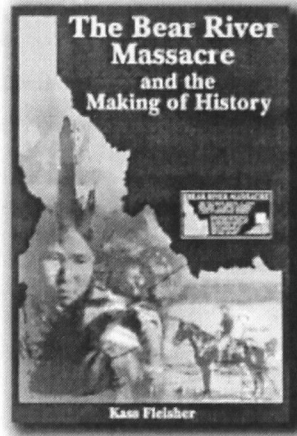
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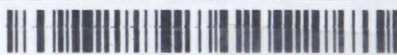
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