



# VIAJE DE REGRESO RETURN TRIP

## ISRAEL DOMÍNGUEZ

ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS BY

MARGARET RANDALL

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**VIAJE DE REGRESO  RETURN TRIP**  
**ISRAEL DOMÍNGUEZ**

**ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS BY**  
**MARGARET BANDALL**







*A Zaida Díaz Cueva.  
A los poetas y trovadores de La Estrella de Cuba.  
A mis padres.  
A mis hijas.*

*To Zaida Díaz Cueva.  
To the poets and troubadours at La Estrella de Cuba.  
To my parents.  
To my daughters.*







## THE POETRY OF ISRAEL DOMÍNGUEZ


In one of these poems Israel Domínguez writes: “Emptiness always imposes itself. You are destined to fill it / to create more emptiness. To approach an event... protagonist... secondary figure... extra... spectator... it means you must go home, where a new emptiness awaits.” Absence and its polar opposite, a bountiful fulfillment, inhabit these journeys. They are common to all island dwellers, those who live surrounded by water and must construct “the world out there” from longing and imagination as well as what they can extract from the ground beneath their feet.

This is compounded and acquires another layer of experience if the island is Cuba. A half century of revolution has rendered the country unique: contested space as well as a symbol of hope, a place both reviled and mythologized, too often hidden behind the Sugarcane Curtain, David in Goliath’s shadow. Domínguez, born in 1973, came into his world when the Cuban Revolution had already struggled through its first quarter century. Hardship, sacrifice and defiance were the stuff of every day. He grew up in the context of attempting to create a more just society. He inherited the Revolution’s values, struggled with its contradictions, learned to survive dependent upon its peculiar capacity to invent.

Israel Domínguez was born in 1973 in Placetas, Villa Clara, more or less at the center of the long crocodile-shaped Caribbean island. Throughout his childhood his father recited poetry and he and his mother often accompanied him to performances. Thus Israel came by an early appreciation of the genre. By the time he graduated from the University of Havana in 1996, his family had moved to Matanzas, a city two hours east of Havana, known for its proliferation of bridges and rich cultural heritage. He joined them there, where he continues to be active in the local poetry scene.

Domínguez is a translator. Like so many others, however, his professional life has been affected by Cuba’s precarious economy. For a number of years, and because he could earn so much more in the tourism sector, he quit a job in his field to take one as a bellboy at a hotel on world-famous Varadero Beach. His twelve years on that job produced the poems for his 2002 book *Collage mientras avanza mi carro de equipaje* (*Collage as My Luggage Cart Advances*). Happily, he was eventually able to return to full-time translation. Other poetry collections include *Hojas de cal* (2001), *Sobre un fondo de arena* (2004), and *Después de acompañar a William Jones* (2007). All these books have won important awards on the Island.





*Viaje de regreso / Return Trip* is a compendium of nostalgia, in which a familiar street, an old photograph, or memory of when the trains ran on precision time take up residence in poems in which a mature philosophy of life breaks through a patina of childhood wonder. A clothesline becomes a highway. A plum tree calms the spirit. A public restroom holds a dark menace. A woman's name floats in a swimming pool. A hero of the Great War looms upon the horizon. Through it all, the music and culture of the country to the north refuse to fade into oblivion; despite the ever-present weight of political attack from the United States, a love for its popular culture remains familiar and strong. The poet writes: "Glory belongs to my neighbor / who owns a Buick / and wears a lot of gold."

Domínguez says: "Memory is a return trip, inherent of course to the human being. In my poetry it is not simply an instrument but also its landscape, that is to say, a poetic event [ . . . ]." Then he warns: "It's not about reducing memory to its individual manifestation because collective memory influences the individual and vice-versa."

African Santería, with its gods and rituals, is also present in this book, as well as the scent and architecture of Catholicism in the stones of old churches that have seen their share of decadence and revival. Domínguez names their secret places, brings them out into the open to be delivered from oblivion and stereotypical offense. The poet is also a practicing priest of the Ifá tradition.

He honors as well common words of the Spanish language, lifting them from their context, turning them over in his hand, examining and assigning them identities separate from those of everyday use: "Time is a slope / down which man and vertebrae slide." Family—its protection and also the young man rebelling against its strictures—is also a current running through this collection. Describing a young love unaccepted in his parental home, he laments to an object of his adolescent attraction: "Your image wasn't reflected / in the crystalline waters / my family placed / at the center of the table."

Like many Cuban poets of his generation, Domínguez's work contains living monuments of history, a conversational style, and magic realism in equal measure. In *Return Trip* the reader is invited to peel away layers of emotion and meaning. Most of the poems in this book are short and compact, where memory seems to strain against the confines of line and stanza. They are profoundly male in their essence, although two of the most moving are about the poet's mother. In "Deep Oceans," the last poem in the collection, everything comes together: childhood moments, early inhibitions, the incongruous image of Russian boots treading tropical soil, and an allusion to that first poem which finally allowed the author to find "Overflowing sewer waters, / carrying in their turbulent path / all that surpasses my pretensions."

At a time when the reestablishment of diplomatic relations with Cuba has sparked great interest here, but one in which that interest has too often been syphoned off by mass media attention to the most superficial aspects of Cuban culture, it is a pleasure to have been able to translate and present to a U.S. readership this very Cuban poetry from a very Cuban poet.

—Margaret Randall, Albuquerque, Spring 2016.





La poesía, en dirección contraria, recoge suficiente sal para curtir el espíritu. En viaje de regreso, por la senda opuesta, es memoria convertida en imagen, imagen convertida en memoria. La poesía no se deja arrastrar por la corriente. Río arriba, se revela su condición antisocial (Rimbaud). No molesta al vecino, pero no hace lo que el vecino dice y no repite lo que el vecino hace. Río arriba, una gran cantidad de peces y versos mueren en busca de un nacimiento. Sin embargo, lo más importante no es el nacimiento, sino la travesía: entregarse a una búsqueda que el vecino considera innecesaria. El poeta, además, es un clarividente (Rimbaud). El vecino, con su telescopio, no puede ver lo que el poeta ve. El poeta no es mejor ni peor que el vecino, pero ve lo que el vecino, con su telescopio, no puede ver.

Durante varios años he viajado en dirección contraria, y algunos de mis poemas se han salvado, hasta el momento, refugiándose en el blanco de la página.



Poetry, on its return trip, accumulates enough salt to cure the spirit. On its return trip, on the opposite site of the street, memory becomes image and image memory. Poetry doesn't let itself be dragged away by the current. Up river, it reveals its antisocial condition (Rimbaud). It doesn't bother the neighbor, but it refuses to do what the neighbor says it should, and doesn't mimic what the neighbor does. Up river, a great number of fish and verses die in their attempt at being born. And yet the most important thing isn't birth, but the journey: to give oneself to a search the neighbor doesn't consider necessary. The poet, furthermore, is clairvoyant (Rimbaud). The neighbor, even with his telescope, cannot see what the poet sees. The poet is neither better nor worse than the neighbor, but he sees what the neighbor, with his telescope, cannot see.

For several years I have traveled against the current, and some of my poems have survived, to now, by taking refuge on the whiteness of the page...

—Israel Dominguéz







**VIAJE DE REGRESO**  **RETURN TRIP**





# INTERIORES

1

El viaje a los interiores devuelve en opacidad los días. El sujeto que se concentra en cada instante, disipa la niebla hasta encontrar la nitidez de las imágenes que el tiempo ha deteriorado.

El viaje al punto de partida es camino de invenciones, sangre coagulada, vieja herida que se abre, aroma musical que trasciende piel y frasco, patria a la que regresa el hijo.

Vuelves el rostro hacia la ventanilla y recuerdas el paisaje. Detienes el automóvil, contemplas aquel arbusto que por su rareza es huella profunda de la existencia.

Viajas en dirección contraria obteniendo lo mismo, y recibiendo la parte oculta de algunas vivencias.

El viaje a los interiores es viaje de regreso a los días que hacen de tus entrañas un cuerpo visible.

2

Siempre se impone el vacío. Estás destinado a llenarlo / crear otro vacío. Asistir a un acontecimiento... protagonista... secundario... extra... espectador... presupone regresar a casa, donde espera un nuevo vacío.

Hay vacíos que solo la memoria puede llenar: revisión de la foto que ha penetrado. Viaje de regreso.





## INTERIOR SPACES

1

The journey to interior spaces returns the opacity of days. The person who pays attention at every instant dissipates the mist until he finds the clarity of those images deteriorated by time.

The journey to the beginning is a road of inventions, coagulated blood, an old wound that opens, a musical aroma that transcends skin and container, the nation to which the son returns.

You go back to the face peering out the window and remember the landscape. You stop the car and contemplate that shrub that because of its rarity has left a profound existential mark.

You travel in the opposite direction and the same thing happens. You receive the hidden parts of certain experiences.

The journey to interior spaces is a return to those days that bring your entrails into visible focus.

2

Emptiness always imposes itself. You are destined to fill it / to create more emptiness. To approach an event... protagonist... secondary figure... extra... spectator... it means you must go home, where a new emptiness awaits.

There are empty spaces only memory can fill: revision of the photo penetrated. Return trip.

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**ALGUNAS FOTOS © SOME PHOTOS**





## CON LA MISMA INDIFERENCIA

*A Ernesto Milán*

Sobre la mancha de las primeras aguas  
un pedazo de tronco carcomido  
se bambolea  
con la misma indiferencia  
con que nadie lo mira.  
Ante los ojos del viajero,  
y para su inmensa placer,  
se levanta majestuoso  
el Castillo de Los Tres Reyes del Morro.  
Al apretar el obturador  
él no ha ubicado en su encuadre  
el fragmento de madera.  
El turista se marcha  
y regreso a mi observación.  
Le dedico una larga secuencia,  
aun cuando solo sea eso:  
un pedazo de tronco carcomido  
que se bambolea  
sobre la mancha de las primeras aguas.







## WITH THE SAME INDIFFERENCE

*To Ernesto Milán*

Floating on the water's first stain  
a log eaten by time sways  
with the same indifference  
as when no one pays attention.  
Before the traveler's eyes  
and to his immense delight  
El Morro's Castle of the Three Kings  
rises majestically.  
When he presses the shutter  
he fails to notice  
the piece of wood.  
The tourist departs  
and I return to my pondering.  
I give it a long sequence  
even when it is only that:  
a log eaten by time  
that sways  
on the water's first stain.





## ENTRE TANTA BELLEZA

*To Laura and Yoandra*

Fondo verde  
para blancuras en movimiento.

Estas vidas son efímeras  
como la imagen que encuadra la ventanilla.

Zigzag. Ir y venir.  
Sensación agradable  
parecida a su contraria.

Se extienden hacia ambos lados.  
Entre tanta belleza  
puede perderse el encanto.





## **WITH SUCH BEAUTY**

*To Laura and Yoandra*

A green background  
for white figures in movement.

These lives are as ephemeral  
as the image in the window.

Zigzag. Come and go.  
Pleasant sensation  
like its opposite.

It reaches to either side.  
With such beauty  
its enchantment can be lost.

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## LOS PUENTES READYMADE

Si abres bien los ojos  
podrás ver las pendientes.  
Aquí el viaje es por debajo,  
casi nunca por arriba.  
Los puentes Readymade  
(y la sequía de la patria).  
Espejismo que levantan las manos  
que una vez desearon otro paisaje  
en la nación completa.





## THE READYMADE BRIDGES

Opening wide your eyes  
you see the gradients.  
Here the journey moves below,  
almost never above.  
The Readymade bridges  
(and the country's drought).  
Hands, once eager for another  
landscape, raise a mirage  
in the wholeness of the nation.





## EN LAS TRAVIESAS

En el andén se tiende en mi memoria  
como se impregna en las traviesas  
el olor a ferrocarril.

Por el horizonte aparece un flanco  
que viene recuperando su verdadero forma.

Un punto luminoso va definiéndose  
a medida que son más fuertes la vibraciones.

La solemnidad baja, con cierta acrobacia,  
en uniforme de botones dorados.  
Volverá a los vagones  
y ponchará los boletines.

“No lleva ni un segundo de retraso,”  
dice una sonrisa a la otra.

Pero el andén no siempre es  
una conversación apacible,  
los simulacros del niño vaquero  
en la breve estancia matutina.

En el andén se ha perpetuado el tedio,  
la dureza del sol  
que cuando rebota en el cemento  
se adentra corrompiendo el character.  
El andén le devuelve al viajero los verdes y azules  
con el mismo cinismo con que lo condena.





## ON THE RAILWAY TIES

In my memory the station platform extends itself  
as the railway ties  
exude their odor of trains.

One end appears on the horizon  
regaining its true form.

As the vibrations grow stronger  
a luminous spot comes into focus.

Solemnity descends with acrobatic grace,  
wearing a gold-buttoned uniform.  
It will return to the cars  
and punch the tickets.

“Not a second behind schedule”  
one smile says to another.

But the station platform  
isn't always a mild-mannered conversation,  
simple drill of the cowboy child  
in brief morning light.

Boredom lives on the station platform,  
sun's harshness,  
ricocheting against the cement,  
enters and corrupts my character.  
The station platform gives the traveler back his greens and blues  
with the same cynicism it uses to condemn him.

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## SWEET BUZZ

*A Pedrito Roxy.*

*A Sigfredo Ariel.*

*A los amigos en mi adolescencia.*

Por la carretera ondulante viajan las melodías  
y se posan en las antenas  
de los trasgresores.  
Bajan por la cinta, atraviesan el buster,  
entran después que el locutor ha dicho:  
“Hello again... my name is Casey...”

American Top Forty penetraba los tímpanos  
de una nueva generación  
que recibía el *sweet buzz* de la frecuencia modulada.  
Canciones que alegraron los corazones  
moviéndose por el dial,  
entre pasillos y descargas,  
saboreando la crema de vie el ponce la cerveza,  
mientras la mano congelaba el rostro,  
acompañando la vanidad del tipo  
que se las sabía todas.

Canciones *en viaje de regreso*  
a un instante que hoy nos parece mejor  
cuando en verdad cada tiempo tiene su angustia  
y su pecado.







## SWEET BUZZ

*To Pedrito Roxy.  
To Sigfredo Ariel.  
To the friends of my adolescence.*

Melodies travel this undulating highway  
perching on the antennas  
of those who break the rules.  
They slither down the data file, pierce the bully,  
enter as soon as the announcer says:  
“Hello again... my name is Casey...”

American Top Forty penetrated the eardrums  
of a new generation  
ready for the *sweet buzz* of modulated frequency.  
Songs that cheered hearts  
moved across the dial,  
between recordings and aisles,  
savoring egg creams, punch, beer,  
while a hand froze the face:  
vanity of the guy  
who knows them all.

*Return trip* songs  
going back to a time that seems better now  
when in truth every era has its anguish  
and its sin.

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## SOLES DE AGUA

El límite ondulante funde las orillas.  
De un lado a otro  
viajan los instintos.  
La mano ha dispuesto el movimiento  
pero no puede controlarlo.  
Al centro, en eternal puesta,  
soles de agua  
reciclan la abundancia.





## SUNN MADE OF WATER

These shores define undulating limits.  
Instincts travel  
from one side to the other.  
The hand directs this movement  
but cannot control it.  
At the center, setting over and over again,  
suns made of water  
recycle abundance.





## ALGUNAS FOTOS

1  
Días de otoño.  
En mi balcón  
florece un bonsai.

2  
Aves de paso  
buscan un sitio. Algunas  
se equivocan.

3  
Luz tenue en el patio.  
La tendedera  
es un camino.





## SOME PHOTOS

1  
Autumn days.  
On my balcony  
a bonsai blooms.

2  
Migrating birds  
look for place. Some  
find the wrong one.

3  
Tenuous light in the courtyard.  
The clothesline  
is a highway.





## EL CIRUELO A SUS ANCHAS

*A Richard Pérez and Antón Arrufat*

El ciruelo en el patio  
es la primera figura  
que en viaje de regreso  
acontece.

Desde el árbol hacia fuera  
voy hurgando la sangre,  
los olores, los cuerpos  
que armónicamente conforman  
el paisaje.

Inevitable se establece la distancia  
entre la memoria  
y la escritura que se esfuerza  
por sustituirla.

Desde el árbol hacia dentro me pregunto  
por qué un simple elemento  
se adelante a la coexistencia humana.

El niño abandona juego y roce familiar  
para encontrarse con el árbol.  
En soledad lo trepa, lo sacude, lo acaricia.  
Degusta la carne de sus frutos.  
Vuelve con el doble placer manjar-independencia.

El circuelo en el patio  
a sus anchas  
acontece.





## THE COMFORTABLE PLUM TREE

*To Richard Pérez and Antón Arrufat*

The plum tree in the courtyard  
is the first figure I see  
upon my return.

From its trunk out  
I explore the blood,  
the scents, the bodies  
that make up  
such harmonious landscape.

Inevitable distance  
between memory  
and the writing that tries  
to evoke it.

From the tree in I ask myself  
why any simple element  
is most important for human coexistence.

The child leaves his game and familiar touch  
when he meets the tree.  
He climbs it alone, shakes and caresses it,  
savors the flesh of its fruit,  
returns with the dual pleasure: feast/independence.

The plum tree inhabits  
this courtyard  
comfortably.

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## DIVINO GUIÓN

Los ojos del niño  
son los primeros ojos de la memoria.  
Van y vienen los recuerdos. Se reproducen.

Cerca de la estación, huellas de la guerra.  
Lejos de casa; almuerzo, paz y familia.

Aserrín, sobra, pestilencia.  
Letra escarlata.  
Invitación al baño público.  
Buscadores de dinero fácil  
que fácilmente se complican.  
Asesinos en potencia, y en bataholas.  
Saco de yute en la mano encallecida.  
Equipaje rupestre, colorines, perfumes.  
Número de la mala suerte  
que anuncia el despedidor.

El nombre de una mujer  
    está en las aguas de la piscina.  
El nombre de una mujer es el nombre de una calle.  
El nombre de una mujer  
    es casi el nombre de una ciudad.

*Noche cálida en Santa Clara,*  
había escrito Pedro Llanes.  
Verso que es premonición,  
profecía que se cumple en otros versos,  
en otros aplausos, en otros corazones.  
*Noche cálida en Santa Clara,*





## DIVINE SCRIPT

The child's eyes  
are memory's first perception.  
Images come and go, reproduce themselves.

Near the station, remnants of war.  
Far from home: lunch, peace and family.

Sawdust, leftovers, pestilence.  
Scarlet letter.  
Invitation to the public restroom.  
Searching for easy money  
easily complicated.  
Potential assassins, brawls.  
Sackcloth in the calloused hand.  
Prehistoric baggage, story endings, perfumes.  
Bad luck numbers  
announcing the next departure.

A woman's name  
floats in the swimming pool.  
The woman's name is the name of a street.  
The woman's name  
is almost the name of a city.

*Balmy night in Santa Clara,*  
Pedro Llanes wrote.  
A line that is premonition,  
a prophecy to be fulfilled in other lines,  
other applauses, other hearts.  
*Balmy night in Santa Clara,*

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entre las cervezas que bebíamos  
y las que nunca llegaron.

Algunos buscaban, otros bailaban.  
*La vida es un divino guion.*

Los ojos del niño  
son ahora los ojos en acecho.  
Van y vienen los recuerdos. Se reproducen.





between the beers we drank  
and those we were never served.

Some searched, others danced.  
*Life is a divine script.*

The child's eyes  
are now the eyes that lay in wait.  
Images come and go. They reproduce themselves.



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## FRAGMENTOS

Un fragmento de la iglesia  
(viejo, antiguo, casi prehistórico)  
para el recuerdo.  
Pasando el borde, el resto de la catedral  
que como parroquia puede prescindir  
del fragmento que escogimos.  
Y sin embargo sin él  
no sería la misma:

himno sobre la piedra,  
piedra contra el fuego,  
fuego en el rosario,  
rosario bajo la dualidad del fuego.

Pasando el borde, otro fragmento  
donde pongo mi mano y escucho:

Aquí vivió una mujer llamado Gertrudis  
que veía pasar al hombre que amó en soledad.  
El se convertiría en un prócer de la Guerra Grande  
abandonado y muerto.  
Ella descansaría en la manigua  
bajo una cruz sin nombre.

Mi mano aún está sobre la madera  
y continúo escuchando...

En *El Caimán Barbudo*, el fragmento de la iglesia  
vieja, antiguo, casi prehistórico.  
Un grupo buscando la piedra filosofal  
y un jefe que no parece un jefe,  
más bien un roquero de Seattle.

Pasando el borde, otro fragmento  
donde pongo mi mano  
y escucho...





## FRAGMENTS

A fragment of church  
(old, ancient, almost prehistoric)  
for memory's sake.  
Circling, the rest of the cathedral  
as a parish can do without  
any fragment we choose,  
yet without it  
wouldn't be the same:

hymn on stone,  
stone against fire,  
fire in the rosary,  
rosary beneath duality of fire.

Circling, another fragment  
where I place my hand and listen:

A woman named Gertrude lived here,  
she saw the man she loved pass by.  
He would become a hero of the Great War  
abandoned and dead.  
She sleeps in scrubland  
beneath an anonymous cross.

My hand remains upon the wood  
and I continue to listen...

In *El Caimán Barbudo*<sup>1</sup> the fragment of church,  
old, ancient, almost prehistoric.  
A group looking for the philosopher's stone  
and a functionary like a rock star from Seattle  
posing with poets before it.

Circling, another fragment  
where I place my hand  
and listen...





## ROSTRON

*Y la apariencia de su rostro se hizo otra*  
y vieron el rostro del Obispo  
y el Obispo se convirtió en estatua  
y la estatua se transfiguró en el Cristo del Buen Viaje  
y volvió a ser el Obispo  
que desde la cima de una loma—a pocos kilómetros  
de la entrada o salida de Sancti Spíritus—  
da buena suerte al viajero.

Transfiguración. Historias que se confunden,  
se mezclan, se transforman.  
Detrás de cada hombre puede haber un Cristo  
si es voluntad del hombre enfrentar el camino  
y hay suficiente fe para caminar sobre las aguas.

Plaza de Jesús. Puente del Yayabo.  
Serafín Sánchez: el Paso de las Damas.  
A la orilla de un río converso  
sobre el Amor y la Poesía,  
palabras que se acercan o se alejan  
a medida que se acercan o se alejan  
las intenciones.

Entre cuerdas y adoquines vuelvo a recordar:

*La niña se mudó de novio, de Martí,  
de alánimo, y de rueda rueda.*

En la cocina de mi casa  
(vertiendo mis ojos donde hubo cartacuba,  
batey, empalizada . . . )  
veo los rostros del público, de los cantantes,  
de los poetas.  
Y de un rostro llego o regreso a otro,  
rostros de mis edades, y los que he visto  
en voz ajena.







## FACES

*And the features of his face changed  
and they saw the bishop's face  
and the bishop became a statue  
and the statue was transformed into the Christ of Good Travels  
and then became the bishop again  
who from a hilltop—a few miles  
from the entrance or exit to Sancti Spíritus—  
bestows good luck upon the traveler.*

Transfiguration. Confused histories  
that blend, transforming us.  
There could be a Christ behind every man  
if that man has the will to choose the path  
and faith enough to walk on water.

Plaza of Jesus. Bridge over the Yayabo.  
Serafin Sánchez: Paso de las Damas.  
At the river's edge I speak  
about Love and Poetry,  
words that approach or depart  
as intentions approach  
or depart.

Rope and cobblestones bring back the memory:

*The little girl changed sweethearts, from Martí,  
from alánimo, and ruedarueda.<sup>2</sup>*

In the kitchen of my house  
(taking my eyes from where the Cuban Tody once perched,  
outbuilding, fence...)  
I see the faces of the public, of the singers,  
of the poets.  
And from one face I move on to another,  
faces of all my ages, and those I have seen  
in the voices of others.

---

2 Allusions to the songs that accompany children's games.





## EL FUEGO SE EXTIENDA

Entre los bordes que reducen intervalos  
el tedio se disipa  
como la gota de agua en la sartén.

El fuego se extienda. Cataliza el alcohol.

La boca invisible que cantaba  
es la boca de los instantes compartidos.

Los cuerpos se sumergen, se sumergen las almas.





## THE FIRE SPREADS

The edges reducing distance, intervals  
evaporating boredom  
like drops of water in the frying pan.

The fire spreads. Alcohol evaporates.

The invisible mouth that sang  
is the mouth of moments shared.

The bodies sink, and the souls.





## HACIA LA NOCHE

La idea se agranda, estalla o duerme  
en *el largo viaje de un día hacia la noche*.  
Nuevas caras en los peldaños  
por donde bajamos y subimos  
con entusiasmo de escolar.  
Disminuye el interval  
entre los ojos del espectador  
y el verso caminante.  
...El agua cae sobre la piel...  
La idea se agranda, estalla o duerme  
en el viaje, el próximo viaje  
hacia la noche.





## TOWARD NIGHT

The idea grows, explodes or sleeps  
through *day's long journey into night*.

New faces on the steps  
we descend and climb

with a schoolchild's enthusiasm.

The interval between the spectator's eye  
and the walking verse becomes smaller.

...Water falls on skin...

The idea grows, explodes or sleeps  
as it travels, it's next journey  
into night.

1  
/// 45 ///





## LÍNEA DISCONTINUA

A Félix Esquivel

Los versos trazan la línea discontinua  
que divide el camino.  
El amarillo se interpone entre la muerte  
y el viajero.  
Los rayos de la luna andrógina  
chocan contra la cara del chofer.

“No tenemos otra defensa  
que la de nuestros deseos,”  
dijo Rimbaud al ver a los hombres  
embarrados de grasa  
y el diferencial en el asfalto.

La luz del mediodía acentúa  
los espacios baldíos, la hierba quemada.  
Restos de un paisaje agrícola  
cortan los ojos y la fe.

Atravesamos *los extraños pueblos*  
con el mismo desgano  
con que un adolescente llega al aula  
y al pasar el tiempo descubre figurando  
el doble filo del amor.

Marabú en granja abandonada:  
las miserias detienen la mano del albañil.  
Carcoma en madera de portales  
donde la memoria aguarda  
el paso del forastero.

Los versos fluyen.  
Se abren las compuertas.  
Y va quedando atrás  
la línea discontinua  
que divide el camino.





## BROKEN LINE

*To Félix Esquivel*

These verses trace the broken line  
that splits the road.  
Yellow injects itself between death  
and the traveler.  
Rays of an androgynous moon  
collide with the driver's face.

“We possess no defense  
but that of our desires,”  
Rimbaud said when he saw men  
covered in grease  
and the differential on the pavement.

Midday light accentuates  
the barren spaces, burnt grass.  
Remnants of an agricultural landscape  
pierce eyes and faith.

Let us move through *the strange towns*  
with the indifference  
of an adolescent coming to class  
who as time passes discovers the image  
of love's dual sides.

Marabou on an abandoned farm:  
misery stays the bricklayer's hand.  
Rotted wood of entranceways  
where memory awaits  
the traveler's step.

Verses flow.  
The floodgates open.  
And the broken line  
that splits the road  
is left behind.

111147111





## EL CAMINO DE LA POESÍA

Casi internados en el bosque.  
Estamos en la ciudad  
pero aquí no existe.  
El verso fluye.  
Las canciones se adentran.  
La hermosura de las muchachas  
adorna los límites  
entre el bosque y la ciudad.

No vuelven los tiempos de Cyrano.  
La gracia no es del poeta.  
La gloria, de mi vecino  
que tiene un Buick  
y lleva prendas de oro.

Un extraño se acerca para hablar del poema.  
El público no dice nada. Aplaude.  
Casi internados en el bosque,  
por el camino de la poesía.  
El público no dice nada.  
*Frente a veinte o dos mil  
el error es el mismo.*







## POETRY'S PATH

Almost hidden in the forest.  
We are in the city  
but it doesn't exist here.  
Verse flows.  
Songs take refuge in themselves.  
The beauty of young girls  
adorns the dividing line  
between forest and city.

Cyrano's time does not return.  
Grace is not the poet's province.  
Glory belongs to my neighbor  
who owns a Buick  
and wears a lot of gold.

A stranger approaches to speak of the poem.  
The public says nothing. They applaud.  
Almost hidden in the forest,  
along poetry's pathway.  
The public says nothing.  
*In front of twenty or two thousand,  
it is the same mistake.*





## MADERA HÚMEDA

A Coyra, Ian, Noël y Pepe

Entrada neoclásica para los muertos.  
Leones de la abundancia y el poder.  
Nombre de blanco esclavista  
para el refinamiento de la ciudad.

Si el público aplaude, eres buen poeta.  
Cuán provinciano esa manera de medir la poesía.

Prado imitando a otro prado  
Mar que se conforma con los límites del elogio.  
Letra de canción laudatoria.  
Lo único admirable, la voz del cantante.

El nombre de este lugar  
es la contrapartida de su esencia.  
Esperaba fuego multiplicado  
y encontré madera húmeda.  
*...tan limpia que lastima.*  
El vacío es perfecto.





## DAMP WOOD

*To Coyra, Ian, Noël and Pepe*

Neoclassical door for the dead.  
Lions of abundance and power.  
White slave owner's name  
for the city's refinement.

If the public applauds, you're a good poet.  
Such a provincial way of measuring poetry.

One lawn imitating another.  
A sea conforming to the strictures of praise.  
Lyrics of the laudatory song.  
The singer's voice is all that matters.

The name of this place  
is the counterpoint of its essence.  
I hoped for multitudinous fire  
and found damp wood.  
*...so clean it hurts.*  
The perfect emptiness.





## CERCANÍA DEL FILO

Ya en el encierro  
la sangre se congela,  
se respire la culpa.  
Lo que ayer solo fue un anuncio,  
un desvío alejándose,  
hoy es cercanía del filo.

Los condenados clavan los ojos.  
El circo al pueblo oscuro  
trae la alegría.

El hombre exagera lo que no tiene.

Un convicto declama con la misma pasión  
con que defiende su código,  
con la misma fe con que justifica  
la muerte de sus adversarios.

En el encierro la sangre se pasma.  
La estrofa llega. Crece.





## THE EDGE'S PROXIMITY

Now in confinement  
blood congeals,  
you breathe blame.  
What was merely a warning yesterday,  
a detour moving farther away,  
is the edge's proximity today.

The condemned rivet your eyes.  
The circus brings joy  
to the dark town.

Humans exaggerate what they do not have.

A convict recites with the same passion  
with which he defends his honor code,  
with the same faith in which he justifies  
his adversaries' death.

In confinement blood freezes.  
The stanza arrives. Grows.

1  
///  
5  
///





# SURCOS

*A Iriam Olivares*

Las palabras no bastan.  
No bastan las buenas intenciones.

Quería terminar la norma de surcos  
para llegar temprano a mis deseos.

Este director que se justifica,  
es decir: se autocrítica,  
llegó temprano a sus deseos.

Las palabras no bastan.  
No bastan las buenas intenciones.

Un verso no se escribe con la mano  
de terminar surcos.





## **FURROWS**

*To Iriam Olivares*

Words are not enough.  
Nor good intentions.

I wanted to plough the last furrow  
in order to sooner cultivate my desires.

This director who justifies,  
that is to say: is self-critical,  
reached his desires early.

Words are not enough.  
Nor good intentions.

A line of poetry isn't written with the hand  
that ploughs furrows.

1  
//  
5  
//





## LA MANO EN LA GAVETA

*A Carlos Augusto Alfonso*

Cuando puso la mano en la gaveta,  
donde yace la osamenta luminosa,  
echaron leña  
al fuego de su poesía.

No hay contradicción alguna  
en que un hombre admire un arbusto  
y corte las ramas que le sobran.







## THE HAND IN THE DRAWER

*To Carlos Augusto Alfonso*

When he put his hand in the drawer  
where luminous bones rest,  
they set his poetry  
on fire.

There is no contradiction  
between admiring a shrub  
and cutting its superfluous branches.

11115111





## BAJO EL SOL

*A Tato Quiñones y Sinecio Verdecia*

Vuelvo a las tierras  
donde los poetas viven  
como si estuvieran apostando  
a los perros de pelea.

*Todo lo que hace el hombre bajo el sol  
es vanidad.*

“Pero no hay que exagerar”,  
mensaje que trajo un íreme  
de Akanarán Efó Muñón,  
Ekobio Mukarará.





## UNDER THE SUN

To Tato Quiñones y Sinecio Verdecia

I return to the lands  
where poets live  
as if they were betting  
at dog fights.

*All that we do under the sun  
is vanity.*  
“But no need to exaggerate,”  
*íreme* brings the message  
from Akanarán Efó Muñón,  
Ekobio Mukarará.





# NACIÓN

Eran hombres valientes  
pero estaban confundidos.  
Se insubordinaron en Santa Rita  
y en Lagunas de Varona.  
Estas camareras tienen su estirpe.  
Nos tratan como hubieran tratado  
a los que quisieron llevar la guerra  
al otro extremo de la Isla.  
Vuelvo al concepto nación.  
Trato de recordar lo que dijo Hermann Hesse:

*La palabra patria nos limita  
si no comprendemos  
que solo hay una patria:  
la Madre Tierra.*

Trato de recordar  
y me llega la duda  
si fue Universo o Madre Tierra  
lo que dijo Hermann Hesse.





## NATION

They were brave men  
but confused.  
They disobeyed orders at Santa Rita  
and at Lagunas de Varona.  
These servants come from the same stock.  
They treat us as they might have treated  
those who wanted to take the war  
to the other end of the Island.  
I go back to the concept of nation.  
I try to remember what Hermann Hesse said:

*The word nation limits us  
if we don't understand  
there is only one nation:  
Mother Earth.*

I try to remember  
but can't  
if Hermann Hesse said  
Universe or Mother Earth.





## ANTES DE VIAJAR

Salir de una ciudad.  
Pensar el próximo segundo...el destino.  
Recorrer lo que fue otra vida.  
Viaje de regreso antes de viajar.  
Las calles, los teatros, el saludo  
    que el pasado dirige hacia la ventanilla.

Fuera del aula, al bajar la escalinata,  
existencia y arte que no enseñan los manuales.  
Melenas, pulsos tejados, canciones en pugna,  
bebida y humo delirante.  
Los primeros versos morían  
preñando la mantis religiosa.  
Adentro, muy adentro, cuajaba el material:  
una figura, un nombre, un cruce de caminos.  
El omnibus con pasajeros colgados,  
cuchillo, sudor y demás ingredientes.  
Ir y venir. Deseos de tragarse  
    los edificios, las plazas, las avenidas.  
Ir y venir. Tiempo congelado.  
Kelvis Ochoa está cantando.  
La vi esfumarse entre la noche y el dolor.  
La Habana vuelve. La Habana se aleja.





## BEFORE TRAVELING

To leave a city.  
To think the next second... destination.  
To travel what was another life.  
Return trip before you leave.  
Streets, theaters, the past  
waving at the window.

Outside the classroom, after descending the stairs,  
life not found in any manual.  
Long hair, woven heartbeats, songs doing battle,  
drink and delirious smoke.  
The first poems died  
impregnating the praying mantis.  
Inside, deep inside, the material took form:  
a figure, a name, a crossroads.  
City bus with passengers hanging from its doors,  
knife, sweat and other ingredients.  
Come and go. The need to swallow  
buildings, public squares, avenues.  
Como and go. Frozen time.  
Kelvis Ochoa is singing.  
I saw it disappear between night and pain.  
Havana returns. Havana moves farther away.





## GLORIETA SIN AGUA

*A Julio Sánchez Chang. Ibá é bàye ntòrun.*

*A Yanier Hechevarría y Edel Morales.*

*A los amigos, hermanos y ahijados de Manzanillo.*

La palabra glorieta y la palabra barco,  
cuando regresan a sus orígenes,  
no sostienen la misma relación que otras palabras.  
Hay un elemento que las convierte en familia:  
raíz que cobra sentido en mi sangre y en mis pasados.

Las noches de domingo viajaban  
desde los confines del pueblo  
y con la lentitud de una vieja locomotora  
iban recogiendo a familiares y enamorados  
hasta llegar al andén-parque,  
a la estación-glorieta.  
Desde allí silbaba la banda municipal  
y la música iba penetrando los cuerpos reposados,  
se acomodaba en la mejor ropa  
que según la costumbre  
era para los domingos por la noche.

Yo asocio desde entonces la palabra glorieta  
a la palabra agua.  
Agua que faltaba en un pequeño estanque  
donde nacía la columna  
sobre la que aún reposan el piso y el techo  
de lo que pudiéramos llamar el centro de la villa.  
Agua por la que nadan en la niebla de mi memoria  
los cisnes que trajo un alquimista  
para que tuviéramos al menos un día  
la sensación de lo desconocido:  
otro paisaje, tierras lejanas.  
Agua que faltaba en un pequeño estanque,  
símbolo de la ausencia... ausencia del mar.







## ROUNABOUT WITHOUT WATER

*To Julio Sánchez Chang, Ibá é bàye ntòrun.*

*To Yanier Hechevarría and Edel Morales.*

*To my friends, siblings and godchildren of Manzanillo.*

The words roundabout and boat,  
when returned to their origins  
do not carry the relationships of other words.  
There is an element that makes them family:  
a root that takes on meaning in my ancestors and blood.

Sunday nights traveled  
past the town limits  
and slow as an old locomotive  
picked up friends and lovers  
until they arrived at the final stop,  
the roundabout.

There the municipal band played  
and its music entered bodies in repose,  
dressed in their finest  
which according to custom  
was for Sunday nights.

Since then I associate the words roundabout  
and water.

Never enough water in the small tank  
by the column upon which  
what we might call floor and roof  
of the city center still rest.  
Water upon which, in the mist of my memory,  
swans an alchemist brought still swim  
so that for one day at least  
we might experience  
a sensation of the unknown:  
another landscape, far-off lands.  
Water gone from a small tank,  
symbol of absence... absence of the sea.





La primera vez que escribí ausencia dije:  
glorieta sin agua.  
Luego la convierto en estanque...  
No hubo entonces error en la palabra impresa  
como tampoco grandes equívocos en mi vida,  
pero mi camino se fue abriendo  
a nuevas constelaciones.  
Mis ojos ante la glorieta de mi pueblo  
no son ni serán los ojos de Calafell  
mirando con emoción la techumbre morisca  
de la glorieta manzanillera.  
Sin embargo, yo digo Manzanillo  
y prefiero la palabra barco,  
prefiero la humildad en la pequeñez de esos barcos  
del Golfo de Guacanayabo.  
Profunda es la belleza cuando nos sorprende  
en el filo de las periferias.  
Yo digo Manzanillo y unos labios me rozan  
con la certeza de que volverán a la indolencia  
de las imágenes que repaso en la distancia.  
Yo pronuncio la palabra barco y un mar oscuro  
se concentra  
en un punto luminoso por donde se precipita  
para fundar la ciudad.

Voz de Benny, inquitada y soberana,  
en una intersección donde las casas  
parecen perder su tiranía.  
Balcón para la noche-beso y para la noche-abrazo.  
Ruinas, espacios, edificios, marcas de la prosperidad  
que fue cediendo en absurdas igualdades.  
Palo de cochero brutal equivalente a la aptatía  
con que tratan al pasajero.  
Rostros mezclando con rareza la solidaridad  
y el orgullo.  
Ojos, labios, bigotes de madera  
donde el custodio comparte la pipa  
con el hijo rebelde y su amigo marginal  
mientras brinda café a las bocas  
que se tragan el aserrín.





The first time I wrote absence I said:  
    roundabout without water.  
    Then I changed it to tank...  
There was no error then in the printed word  
    and no great mistakes in my life,  
    but my path opened  
    to new constellations.  
My eyes contemplating my town's roundabout  
    are not nor will they be the eyes of Calafell  
    gazing with emotion at the Moorish ceiling  
    of Manzanillo's roundabout.  
    Nevertheless, I say Manzanillo  
    and prefer the word boat,  
prefer the humility in the size of those small boats  
    resting upon the dead waters  
    of Guanacacaybo Gulf.  
    Beauty is deep when it surprises us  
    at its peripheral edges.  
I say Manzanillo and lips brush mine  
    sure they will return to the languor  
    of those distant images I see.  
I pronounce the word boat and an obscure sea  
    gathers  
    at a luminous point where foam  
    rises to create the city.

Benny's<sup>3</sup> voice, restless and sovereign,  
    at an intersection where the houses  
    seem to lose their dominance.  
Balcony of the goodnight kiss and goodnight embrace.  
Ruins, spaces, buildings, signs of prosperity  
that lost themselves in absurd equalities.  
Brutal coachman's stick like the apathy  
    he shows his passenger.  
    Faces in a rare mix of solidarity  
    and pride.  
    Eyes, lips, wooden mustaches  
    where the custodian shares a pipe  
with his rebel son and marginal friend  
    as he offers coffee to mouths  
    that swallow sawdust.





Yo digo Manzanillo y en viajes de regreso  
recorro la nación  
desde un pedazo de hierro calcinado  
por el salitre matancero  
hasta el paladar que degusta una liseta.  
Yo digo Manzanillo  
y aunque prefiero la palabra barco  
la techumbre morisca punzonea  
para recordarme la primera vez que escribí  
glorieta sin agua.





I say Manzanillo and on return trips  
I travel the nation  
from a scrap of iron  
burnt by Matanzas' salty residue  
until my palate tastes tile.  
I say Manzanillo  
and although I prefer the word boat  
a Moorish ceiling is engraved  
on my memory of the first time I wrote  
roundabout without water.





## VARIACIONES DEL AGUA

*A Laura María Palomino Mariño.*

*A Alexander Lobaina.*

*A William, Mijail y Pedrito.*

Llueve sobre Caracas.  
Nunca antes ha llovido como ahora.  
¿Es esto una exageración. La nostalgia y el asombro  
se confabulan para que yo exagere?  
Amo a una mujer. Su nombre ha cambiado  
en la espera involuntaria de las aproximaciones.  
“¿Es el amor eterno?” una niña pregunta.  
Al abrir su boca devuelve un mar aciclonado.  
La espuma golpea mi rostro  
que no soporta la imposibilidad de una respuesta.  
Solo alcanzo a responderle:  
“Amo a una mujer. Su nombre ha cambiado  
en la espera involuntaria de las aproximaciones”.

Llueve. Está lloviendo entre el miedo de salir  
a la calle asesina  
y el deseo de atravesar la noche.  
Por la piel de la mujer que amo, por sus conductos vegetales,  
por su cuerpo que en un instante renuncia  
a todos los cuerpos para unirse al mío  
y de esta manera se une a todos los cuerpos  
que renuncia,  
por sus interiores de fuego y savia agridulce,  
entre sus senos y hasta su vagina  
llueve  
está lloviendo  
cae el agua  
como se avalancha el chaparrón de sangre  
desde la cima-cabeza degollada,  
como se avalancha la material en el Tobogán  
de la Selva,  
donde ahora estoy, en una foto,  
y en la foto posamos mis amigos y yo





## VARIATIONS OF WATER

*To Laura María Palomino Mariño.*

*To Alexander Lobaina.*

*To William, Mijail and Pedrito.*

It rains in Caracas.  
Never before has it rained like this.  
Am I exaggerating? Do nostalgia and astonishment  
conspire so I exaggerate?  
I love a woman. Her name has changed  
in the involuntary span of approximations.  
Is love eternal, a young girl asks.  
When she opens her mouth she vomits a cyclone sea.  
Its foam hits my face  
that cannot bear the impossibility of response.  
I am only able to answer:  
“I love a woman. Her name has changed  
in the involuntary span of approximations.”

It rains. It is raining between my fear of going out  
into the assassin street  
and my desire to enter the night.  
In the skin of the woman I love, in its vegetable passages,  
in her body that in an instant refuses every other body  
to join with mine  
and in this way she joins all the bodies  
she refuses,  
in her inner fire and sweet and sour sap,  
between her breasts and even her vagina  
it rains  
it is raining  
water falls  
like an avalanche a bloody downpour  
from the summit of a decapitated head,  
like avalanche material  
Toboggan of the Jungle,  
where I stand now, in a photo,  
and in the photo my friends and I pose





con cerveza en mano, espuma de la cerveza,  
    espuma del Jacuzzi natural...  
no hay por qué decir que llueve,  
    que nunca antes ha llovido como ahora.

Había mirado un hombre y un espinazo.  
“El tiempo se petrifica”, pensé, “el tiempo es ladera  
    por donde se deslizan hombre y vertebrado”,  
mano de hombre que captura, cocina,  
    y graba espinazo,  
huella de aquella noche en que hombre y pez  
se resistieron a desaparecer.  
*Y pasó un águila* y quedó petrificada,  
y pasó también una serpiente, y pasaron otros,  
y cayó un bisonte en la trampa de su propia imagen  
y quedó grabado como constancia de la Resistencia.  
Había mirado un dolmen; conversé con un piaroa  
mientras comíamos catara y bebíamos manaca,  
un piaroa primigenio, de esos que nos salvan  
    o nos aniquilan en un segundo,  
de los que no toman cola ni se suben a un Toyota  
    en *jeans y t-shirt*  
con Polar Ice y gafas oscuras,  
de los que no preguntan los precios de un mundo  
que solo puede salvarse si el piaroa no pregunta  
y anda,  
si volvemos a ser piaroa que no pregunta y anda.  
Vuelvo al cuarto oscuro-retina-cinematográfico.  
Cruzo las aguas del Orinoco.  
Como papa rellena colombiana  
    mirando el paisaje venezolano.  
Arepas de Puerto Acyacucho  
    En los ojos de una hermosa indígena,  
ojos de la selva diluyendo las naciones.  
Aguas del Orinoco, aguas del río Zaza,  
Remolinos dulces, empalizadas bajo las cuales  
    *la muerte presume.*  
Aguas del Orinoco, mitad mujer mitad culebra,  
devoradoras de la tristeza, devoradoras del amor  
    que se aferra a la tierra.









Antes había mirado unos morros  
y había comido queso de la llanura,  
había conocido a un panadero que se llama Miguel  
que toma y canta con boca de pueblo  
y en boca de pueblo llegaron los techos  
y las casas de carton.

Y bajo la triste lluvia que no se lleva la pobreza  
entró el viento por donde entran los toreros.  
(De espalda al poema, fogotrafías y cartels indican  
que arena y bullicio esperan al gladiador  
que en vez de arrodillarse y saludar, embiste  
sin saber que embistiendo  
no habrá banderillas ni ovaciones).

Llueve. Esta lloviendo sobre la arena de la plaza,  
sobre la arena de un país que deja de ser el mío  
cuando en el aire todo se vuelve un mismo lugar.  
La lejanía, ¿acaso un pretexto?, para no reconocer  
que la soledad es el único sitio verdadero.







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**EXTRAÑA CRIATURA © STRANGE CREATURE**





## PUNTA DE ÍNDICE

Kitsch en letra y música  
sobre ruedas de viejo carro Americano,  
a 300 pesos la distancia,  
después de congelarse  
el transporte intermunicipal.

Atravesé un fragmento de la inmensa llanura.  
Cerveza en mi boca. Júbilo en mis sienes.  
“Como en las películas de Hollywood”,  
llegué diciendo a la ciudad de Camagüey.

Por el auricular se había anunciado  
una noche intensa.  
Diseminándose, una noche intensa sucedió.

Esperaste paciente y deseosa  
bajo la magia que se extiende  
a lo largo de la *Avenida del Puerto*.  
De La Habana a Matanzas,  
de Matanzas a La Habana,  
viajaría nuestra sangre.

Con la punta de nuestros índices  
nos amamos a escondidas,  
yema que provocó el escándalo,  
la envidia de algunos.

El chisme y la provincia  
redujeron la memoria  
a una pequeña mancha del paisaje.

Hay un intervalo en la cercanía  
que los monstruos de la razón  
perpetúan y alargan.





## TIP OF THE INDEX FINGER

Kitsch in lyrics and music  
on the wheels of an old American car,  
300 pesos for the ride  
after intercity transport  
was no more.

Dare one fragment of the immense plain.  
Beer in my mouth. Jubilation at my temples.  
“Just like Hollywood movies”  
I said when I got to the city of Camaguey.

Over the telephone wire  
news of a night of intensity.  
And as it spread, an intense night happened.

You waited patient and filled with desire  
beneath the magic that ran  
all along the *Avenida del Puerto*.  
From Havana to Matanzas,  
from Matanzas to Havana,  
our blood would travel.

With the tips of our index fingers  
we made hidden love,  
fingertips that provoked scandal,  
the envy of some.

Gossip and the province  
reduced memory  
to a small stain on the landscape.

There is a nearby place  
the monsters of reason  
perpetuate and draw out.

1  
//  
19  
//





No quisiera recordar el punto  
en que la noche comenzó a disminuir.  
No quisiera recordar.

Punta de índice. Frenesí.  
Yema que provocó el escándalo.







I don't want to remember the moment  
in which the night began to get smaller.  
I don't want to remember.

Point of the index. Delirium.  
Fingertip that provoked the scandal.



# EXTRAÑA CRIATURA

*Para Rachel Moreno*

Miro a través de la ventanilla  
un punto apenas visible  
entre el río y los framboyanes,  
donde hubiera querido besarte  
sin escondernos,  
con la plenitud que solo se alcanza  
cuando un abrazo no tiene que esperar.

Lugar-cicatriz,  
al que debería volver  
después que la memoria trascienda el dolor.  
Me pediste que lo nombrara  
y con la ingenuidad de un adolescente  
lo llamé el Rincón de la Tarde.  
Sin embargo, como cualquier otro sitio  
la tarde puede ser figuración del alma  
si no es solo material  
lo que despiden los cuerpos.

Mientras el ómnibus vuela sobre las aguas  
miro una rara especie que se asoma  
como si nuestros labios al rozarse  
crearan una nueva criatura:  
extraño pez que nos observa,  
mensajero y testigo de un segundo inigualable  
(en sus escamas y vísceras se concentra  
toda la intensidad).  
Extraño pez que va saltando río arriba,  
que se transforma en girasol iluminado  
el centro de la noche,  
cruza los techos, atraviesa los patios y los parques,



## STRANGE CREATURE

*For Rachel Moreno*

I look out the window  
at a barely visible point  
between the river and the Framboyán trees,  
where I would have wanted to kiss you  
without hiding,  
with the plentitude only possible  
when an embrace doesn't have to wait.

Scar-place,  
where I should have returned  
after memory transcended pain.  
You asked me to name it  
and with adolescent innocence  
I called it Afternoon Retreat.  
Yet, like any other place  
an afternoon can be an invention of the soul  
if bodies exhale  
more than matter.

As the bus flies across the waters  
I see a rare being appear  
as if our lips when they met  
created a new creature:  
strange fish that observes us,  
messenger and witness of a singular second  
(all intensity concentrated  
in its scales and gut).  
Strange fish that leaps upriver,  
transforming itself into a sunflower  
illuminating the center of the night,  
it crisscrosses rooftops, passes through patios and parks,





entra por la ventana de mi cuarto y se posa  
convirtiéndose en mujer,  
pidiendo entre gemidos la suavidad de mis manos.

El omnibus se aleja, regreso a sus interiores.  
Aunque el silencio y la vanidad se acentúan  
como una mancha de vino en mi camisa  
yo prefiero seguir recordando aquella tarde  
en que una extraña criatura se asomaba  
para salvarnos.





enters through the window of my room and poses  
becomes a woman  
begging between moans the tenderness of my hands.

The bus moves off, I return to its interior.  
Although silence and vanity stand out  
like a wine stain on my shirt  
I prefer remembering that afternoon  
when a strange creature came  
to save us.





## EN EL APARTADO DE LA SALA 3

Un beso tierno, un beso adolescente  
en el apartado de la sala 3.  
Un beso ruso  
respirando el hedor.  
Asustan las puertas:  
el prejuicio enfría la sangre.

En el apartado  
—mientras punza la fractura  
y rechina el paciente—  
una mujer espera lo que deseo:  
un beso,  
casi de niño,  
que trascienda los límites  
de su equivocación.





## IN THE REMOVE OF EXAMINING ROOM 3

A tender kiss, an adolescent kiss  
in the remove of Examining Room 3.

A Russian kiss  
exuding a bad odor.  
The closing doors frighten:  
prejudice cools the blood.

In the remove  
—as the fracture throbs—  
and the patient recoils—  
a woman waits for what I want:  
a kiss,  
almost a child's kiss,  
that transcends the limits  
of its equivocation.





## DESPUÉS DE LA CONQUISTA

Los que tenían tremenda labia  
eran adoradores de Vargas Vila.  
Yo que precisaba comenzar  
aprendí algunas frases que luego recitaría  
tembloroso.

A los que tenían tremenda labia  
no pregunté que hacer  
después de la conquista.

Me quedé solo en un banco:  
señal de que lo nuestro terminaba  
cuando en verdad no había comenzado.

Avancé por calles desconocidas.  
Al llegar a casa...  
las luces del pueblo  
dejaban caer sobre el tejado  
toda su pesadumbre.







## AFTER THE CONQUEST

Those with tremendous lip  
were Vargas Vila devotees.  
I who was just beginning  
learned a few phrases I'd later recite  
trembling.

I never asked those with tremendous lip  
what I should do  
after the conquest.

I sat alone on a bench:  
a sign that what we had was finished  
when in truth it had never begun.

I moved through unfamiliar streets.  
When I got to my house...  
the lights of the town  
let all their grief  
fall upon the rooftops.





## UN ANIMAL PEQUEÑO NOS DETUVO

Tu imagen no se reflejaba  
en las aguas cristalinas  
que al centro de la mesa  
dispuso mi familia.

A la hora del parque amontonaban estiércol  
hablantines y astutos consejeros.

Inocencia y rebeldía forjaron mi coraza:  
crucé alumbradas,  
puse orejeras en caballo de metal.

Al acercarnos  
un animal pequeño nos detuvo.  
Tu cuerpo y mi cuerpo  
aún detenidos  
por esa terrible distancia  
que la inexperiencia  
define.





## A SMALL ANIMAL STOPPED US

Your image wasn't reflected  
in the crystalline waters  
my family placed  
at the center of the table.

At the hour of the park, dung, chatter  
and wise advice piled up.

Innocence and rebellion lined my shield:  
I crossed barbed wire fences,  
put earmuffs on a metal horse.

As we drew near  
a small animal stopped us.  
Your body and mine  
still frozen  
by that terrible distance  
defined by  
inexperience.





## DENTRO DEL CÍRCULO

Cuando procuraron cerrar las compuertas  
entre los muertos y la vida que no deseábamos para ti  
ya era demasiado tarde.

En el umbral de una iglesia lejana,  
descalza y harapienta,  
tomaste la primera comunión.  
Fuiste, ¿o acaso todavía eres?, prosélito y proselitista.  
Fuiste, ¿o acaso todavía eres?, cuerpo que bulle  
en canto celestial.

El tren que atravesó el centro de la Isla,  
la cazuela de brujo,  
el mayombero vacilador el tata voluptuoso,  
el robo de tus pertenencias  
no eran más reales que el viaje dentro del círculo  
que trazaste en la tierra.

Ponías y quitabas signos. Solo el mandala  
permanecía.  
A tu lengua llegaron seres que asustaban a tu madre.  
Nuestra ruptura, y algunos de mis “libros raros”  
fueron para tu familia la única razón.

Y sin embargo, en la copa de la clarividente  
siguen emergiendo las imágenes  
de tu padre maltratado.  
Clara y yema por su ropa deportiva de marca,  
clara y yema lanzo la chusma  
que gritaba golpeando golpeaba gritando  
como si la patria se defendiera con indecencia.

*Bubbles in the air / Castillo sobre puño y letra  
de quien prometió una vida afortunada  
donde usted también puede tener un Buick.  
“No puedes usar tu inteligencia, te inculcaron,  
en estudios que los comunistas te van a sacar en cara”.*





## INSIDE THE CIRCLE

When they tried to shut the doors  
between the dead and a life we didn't want for you  
it was already too late.

On the threshold of a distant church,  
barefoot and threadbare,  
you made your first communion.  
You were, or maybe still are, convert and proselytizer.  
You were, or maybe still are, the body seething  
in celestial song.

The train that crosses the Island's midpoint,  
witch's cauldron,  
trickster, clown, voluptuous nanny,  
stealing his belongings:  
none of these were more real than that journey  
inside the circle you drew in the dirt.

You placed signs and took them away. Only the mandala  
remained.  
Beings who frightened your mother posed on your tongue.  
Our breakup and some of my "strange books"  
were the only reason your family gave.  
And yet, in the clairvoyant's crystal ball  
images of your abused father  
keep appearing.  
Egg white and yoke for his name-brand sportswear,  
white and yoke the lowlife threw  
shouting as they hit, hitting as they shouted  
as if the nation defended itself obscenely.

*Bubbles in the Air* / a castle rising in the handwriting  
of those who promised a successful life  
where *you too can own a Buick*.  
"You cannot use your intelligence," they taught you,  
"studying what the communists will throw in your face."





Lancha bote balsa engendra,  
fantasma que mantenía en sobresalto  
las pieles de mi hogar.  
Una larga lista de rumores y aventuras  
avinagraron el rostro de los comensales.  
No hubo plato ni cubiertos para ti.

Nunca te llegó “la salida”. Miami no dejó de ser  
la postal,  
la voz de La Cubanísima anunciando  
los manjares de la Calle 8.  
Tiempo perdido. Alambre de púa. Bocabajo. Escalera.

Empezaste hablando con los muertos. Terminaste  
distanciada.  
Laberinto que puede repetirse  
si la sangre se revuelve  
en ese vaivén macabro de la memoria.

Solo quiero recordar aquel verano de 1992.  
Mi boca fue aproximándose. Tus labios se abrieron.





Ferry boat raft mutant  
ghost that kept my home skin  
in constant agitation.  
Long list of rumors and adventures  
sour the faces of dinner guests.  
There was no plate, no utensils for you.

Your exit visa never arrived. Miami remained  
a postcard,  
voice of the Cubanísima announcing  
Eighth Street's wonders.  
Waste of time. Barbed wire. On the ground. Ladder.

You began talking with the dead. You ended up  
alone.  
Labyrinth that can repeat itself  
if blood churns  
in memory's macabre comings and goings.

I only want to remind you of that summer, 1992.  
My mouth approached yours. Your lips parted.

11195111









**LOS MARES PROFUNDOS © DEEP OCEANS**





## EN CÍRCULO DE MADERA

Lo que dijeron las cartas  
cayó sobre la estera  
convirtiéndose en ocho figuras.  
Vista de *obbi* bocabajo, rótula de chivo *keké*,  
pedazos de porcelana, nueve marpacíficos.

Y las figuras se multiplicaron  
hasta que la palabra estuvo definida.  
Ojos cerrados, susurro de animal,  
cantos, *moyugba*, voz afuera, voz adentro,  
esperma, *pirigallo*.

Y se sacrificaron piel y cuero  
hasta que la sangre se disolviera en sangre  
y se consagrarían las semillas.  
Baile agua yerbas, baile armas corona,  
baile mesa mujer, baile palangana dinero,  
baile siembra rascabarriga, bale calabaza *babalao*.

Lo que dijeron las cartas  
cayó sobre la mano  
y en círculo de madera  
las figuras se multiplican  
mientras camino por senderos de luz  
y de sombras.





## WITHIN A WOODEN CIRCLE

What the letters said  
fell on the doormat  
forming eight figures.  
*Obbi's* eyes facedown, *keké's* kneecap,  
a porcelain shard, nine *marpacíficos*.<sup>6</sup>

And the figures grew  
until we could read each word.  
Eyes closed, animal sigh,  
song, tribute, outer voice, inner voice,  
sperm, leaf bud.

And skin and hide were sacrificed  
until blood dissolved into blood  
and seeds were consecrated.  
Dance water herbs, dance weapons crown,  
dance table woman, dance basin money,  
dance *rascabarriga*<sup>7</sup>, dance *babalao*.

What the letters said  
fell on the hand  
and within a wooden circle  
the figures multiply  
while I walk along paths of light  
and shadow.

---

6 Small and white, often called Cuba's national flower.

7 Bush used in the consecration of a *babalao* or Ifá priest. *Babalao* also means father of the secrets.





# CIUDAD DE TRÁNSITO

Regresar al punto de partida  
para luego seguir de viaje  
provoca una sensación extraña.

Mi ciudad es ahora una ciudad de tránsito.

Solo permanecen intacta la secuencias  
en que abro la puerta...  
cruzo las cortinas  
y llego al cuarto  
donde mi hija duerme.





# TRANSIENT CITY

To return to the point of departure  
in order to continue the journey  
produces a strange sensation.

My city is a transient city now.

The only sequence remaining intact  
is me opening the door...  
drawing the curtains  
and reaching the room  
where my daughter sleeps.

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## PARA LAURA Y DANIELA

*A Teresita y Mayola.*

*A Sandra, Raquel y Yanelys.*

Si tuviera que ser la memoria de mis hijas  
comenzaría con el silencio.  
Un hijo es profundidad,  
un enigma al que bajamos.

Supera la figuración,  
el defecto y la virtud,  
el idilio de los labios que se desbocan.

Cuando mis hijas viajan  
algo de mí va con ellas.

Yo las amo desde el instante  
en que los primeros ojos saltaron al vacío,  
desde la existencia apenas perceptible,  
desde la noche en que subí el mosquetero  
para ver si respiraban,  
ahora que me abrazan y se refugian en mí.

La memoria de mis hijas se ramifica.  
La distancia entre ellas y yo se ramifica.  
El amor, eterno y extraño, se extiende  
entre cielo y bosque.





## FOR LAURA AND DANIELA

*To Teresita and Mayola.  
To Sandra, Raquel and Yanelys.*

If I had to be my daughters' memories  
I would begin with silence.  
A child is depth,  
an enigma to which we descend.

It surpasses imagination,  
defect and virtue,  
the lips' wild romance.

When my daughters travel  
something of me goes with them.

I loved them from the moment  
our eyes leapt into the abyss,  
from barely visible existence,  
from the night I lifted the mosquito netting  
to see if they were breathing,  
now that they embrace and hide in me.

My daughters' memories branch out.  
The distance between us grows.  
Love, eternal and strange, spreads  
between forest and sky.





# BALÓN DE CAPAS TORCIDAS

*A Daniela*

Mi hija monta su bicicleta niquelado,  
modelo magnífico  
para que los infantes aprendan a volar  
y los adolescentes hagan sus malabares.

Un niño de zapatos rotos  
se cruza con la vida que no le ofrece Dios,  
en el mejor de los casos.

Avanza con un cabo de puro enmohecido  
burlando el mediocampo, la defensa, el guardameta.  
Niño que patea balón de capas torcidas  
y se cruza con mi hija bajo el sol de la tarde,  
frente al apóstol  
y la mujer que rompe las cadenas.

Dónde está la mano  
que borre la diferencia?







## BALL OF TWISTED CAPES

*To Daniela*

My daughter mounts her nickel-plated bike,  
magnificent machine  
for infants learning to fly  
and adolescents doing their juggling acts.

A child with broken shoes,  
at best facing a life God  
didn't offer her.

He advances chewing on the wet end of a cigar  
taunting midfield, defense, and goalie.  
Child who kicks a ball of twisted skins  
and crosses my daughter's path in waning sun,  
before Martí  
and the woman breaking her chains.

Where the hand  
that erases that difference?

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## DEL HOLLÍN AMONTONADO EN LA CAMISA

*A Leonel García.*

*A Israel Domínguez, mi padre.*

Ya lo veo llegar. Cara enrojecida.  
Dedos ampollados por el mango del machete.  
Cuerpo que elige el piso  
como la mejor de las camas.

El hollín se amontona en la camisa  
del hombre que va a llegar a su casa  
en el momento en que sus hijos  
se ponen tristes.

Magia simpática diría:  
al hombre se le mancha la camisa  
y los hijos se ponen tristes.

Ya lo veo llegar. Cara enrojecida  
en el rojo de las horas.

Diálogo sobre mi padre y el padre de mi novia,  
hombres unidos por el tiempo  
del hollín amontonado en la camisa  
del hombre que va a llegar a su casa  
en el momento en que sus hijos  
se ponen tristes.





## OF SOOT BUILDING UP ON THE SHIRT

*To Lionel García.  
To my father, Israel Domínguez.*

I see him coming. Red faced.  
Fingers calloused by the machete's grip.  
Body claiming the floor  
as if it were the best of beds.

Soot builds up on the shirt  
of the man coming home  
precisely when his children  
grow sad.

Sympathetic magic I would say:  
the man soils his shirt  
and his children grow sad.

I see him coming. Red faced  
in the redness of time.

Dialogue on my father and my girlfriend's father,  
men united by a time  
of soot building up on the shirts  
of men coming home  
precisely when their children  
grow sad.



## EL TAC-TAC DE LA CHANCLETA IZQUIERDA

A Rolando Estévez,  
quien conversa en la cocina de mi casa  
mientras Mireya hace café.

ponerle a la mesa, mostrarle a los amigos.  
—Alberto Rodríguez Tosca

Cuando mi madre arrastra su pierna  
yo no me compadezco como el vecino  
                  que cumple con su deber de buen ciudadano:  
el dolor se encharca  
y el alma se cubre de limo.

Cuando en la oscuridad del corredor imaginario  
mi madre camina, y mientras avanza  
retumba el tac-tac... de su chancleta izquierda  
yo no me compadezco como el buen samaritano:  
por mis conductos fluye un río de fuego  
y las paredes se estremecen revolviendo el ácido  
                  que se concentra en las articulaciones.

Mi madre arrastra junto a su pierna  
el Alzheimer de mi abuela  
y yo no me compadezco como el espectador  
                  que se reconforta  
ante *el show de la podredumbre ajena*:  
mi dolor es el dolor de César Vallejo:  
hoy no sufro solamente.

Mi madre arrastra junto a su pierna  
la tragedia de mi padre, la alegría estúpido  
                  de los enemigos, la indolencia, el *marabu*...  
y yo no me compadezco como un simple compañero:  
rabia la sangre y de un manotazo  
tiro las miserias.







Sin embargo, no siempre fue mi madre  
la angustia que hoy se me atraganta.  
Hubo un tiempo de *epifanía inmarcesible*:  
un aire fresco y saludable que inundaba la casa,  
un instante en que se creía en el amor  
como en casi todo,  
y era mi madre la línea parpadeante,  
la dulce ingenua idea de que nada se iba a acabar.

Trato de conformarme  
pero la conformidad es un cuchillo de doble filo.  
Trato de aceptar, y aunque sé que la vida  
siempre abre una puerta  
poner la cabeza donde va el corazón  
es el hermoso traje de la sabiduría  
que ahora no me sirve.

Si mi madre es el dolor permanente  
también pudiera ser el único alivio a ese dolor.  
Veo a mi madre infatigable, dura como el quebra hacha,  
acomodando al Abadón de su cervical  
con la misma humildad con que un varentierra  
resiste un ciclón.  
Cuando está a punto de decir *basta hasta aquí*  
*ya me cansé*

el gesto se suaviza, cobra su rostro  
la dulzura habitual  
y convierte al Alzheimer en un niño pulcro y oloroso.  
Veo a mi madre arrancando los coágulos  
que se pegan a las hojas del *marpacífico*.  
La veo con los zapatos gastados, las manos limpias  
y sostiene el peso de un ideal  
como quien soporta en sus brazos  
una pila de caña quemada.  
La veo sacrificarse (si es preciso, dejaría de existir)  
para que su hijo vanidoso escriba versos  
que probablemente no cambien nada  
ni a nadie.





Yet my mother wasn't always  
the anguish that chokes me today.  
There was a time of *unseen epiphany*:  
a fresh and healthy breeze coursing through the house,  
an instant in which we believed in love  
like almost everything else,  
and my mother was the flickering line,  
the sweet and genuine idea that nothing would end.

I try to resign myself  
but resignation is a double-edged blade.  
I try acceptance, and although I know that life  
always opens a door,  
putting reason where the heart goes  
is a beautiful suit of wisdom  
that no longer fits.

If my mother is perennial pain  
she might also be that pain's only remedy.  
I see my mother untiring, tough as one who resists the ax,  
settling her cervical Abaddon  
with the same humility with which earth  
resists the storm.  
When she is about to say *enough for now*  
*I'm tired*

her face softens, reassumes  
its habitual sweetness  
and she turns Alzheimer's into a clean sweet-smelling child.  
I watch my mother removing the parasites  
that stick to the *marpacífico* leaves.  
I see her with her worn out shoes and clean hands  
as she joins the Great March  
sustaining the weight of an ideal  
like one who carries in her arms  
a pile of burnt cane.  
I see her sacrifice herself (if necessary, she would cease to exist)  
so her vain son can write poems  
that probably won't change anything  
or anyone.





Cuando mi madre arrastra su pierna  
yo me pregunto:  
De qué material están hechos los seres  
que arrastran el dolor  
con la misma paciencia  
con que ofrecen la vida.







When my mother drags her leg  
I ask myself:  
What are those beings made of  
who drag pain  
as patiently  
as they give life.





## ALGUNAS FOTOS

Tengo en mis manos algunas fotos  
de una vida que no he vivido.  
Un sueño del que no se advierte ninguna huella  
me llevó en su regazo a las primeras imágenes.  
Mi madre trae en sus palabras  
el olor de mi piel mezclado con talco y colonia.  
Pero su recuerdo no es suficiente.  
Solo mi memoria-escalpelo desentraña  
y las pinzas extraen la sangre coagulada.

Tengo algunas fotos  
y el escalpelo se pierde en un abismo  
de orígenes virtuales.  
Pasan el gorjeo y el llanto que no puedo escuchar,  
una sonrisa por la que no siento añoranza.  
Pasan y vuelven a la gaveta  
donde se empolva el paraíso  
que no reconozco.





## SOME PHOTOS

I have some photos in my hands,  
photos of a life I have not lived.  
A dream of someone who cannot recognize a footstep  
took me on her lap in the first images.  
My mother's words hold the scent  
of my skin mixed with talcum and cologne.  
But her memory is not enough.  
Only my memory-scalpel digs deep enough  
to extract the dried blood.

I have some photos  
and the scalpel looses itself in an abyss  
of virtual organs.  
The gurgle and cry I cannot hear pass me by,  
a smile for which I do not long.  
They pass and return to the drawer  
where the paradise I do not recognize  
gathers dust.

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## LOS MARES PROFUNDOS

Como la imagen que apenas percibimos,  
cuando se empañan los cristales,  
regresan algunas fotos.  
Van apareciendo, mientras cesa la tormenta,  
el techo de zinc, el ciruelo, el escusado.  
Un niño juega, sale al mundo  
con un nombre beligerante y doloroso,  
una piel blanquísima que los soles de la nación  
maldicen y castigan.

Un niño entra al mundo  
de hojas empotradas en el fango, estiércol,  
animales que se parecen al hombre  
en su indiferencia y aceptación.  
Resbala y cae en la zanja  
y aunque no entienda y mire las aguas con rechazo  
allí recibe que son parte de su vida.

Aguas albañales, aguas tributarios de los arroyos  
que surcan el barro alborotando la porquería  
y corrompen a las hijas que se multiplican  
más allá de la cerca.

Puras y hermosas, cuando al mirarlas,  
me remontan a las intensas lluvias  
que las convertían en los mares profundos  
de la imaginación.

Aguas albañales, en el camino de regreso a casa,  
bajando día a día, mientras la escuela esperaba,  
obedeciendo el recorrido que dictan  
los cables de la electricidad,  
trillos que acompañan la carretera  
que conduce al centro del pueblo,  
a la pequeña pantalla de la terminal de omnibus  
donde niño y padre fueron a ver el episodio  
las noches en que el apagón como una gran mancha  
se extendía hacia los confines.





## DEEP OCEANS

Like the image we can barely perceive  
when windows fog,  
some photos return.  
They appear, as the storm calms,  
zinc roof, plum tree, toilet.  
A child plays, he goes out into the world  
with a belligerent and painful name,  
super white skin that the nation's suns  
curse and punish.  
A child enters this world  
of leaves tracked in mud, shit,  
animals that resemble man  
in their indifference and acceptance.  
He slips and falls in a ditch  
and although he doesn't understand and rejects the waters  
that's where he receives the elements of his life.

Sewer water, tributaries from the arroyos  
that plow the mud-choked garbage  
and corrupt the daughters who multiply  
beyond the fence.  
Pure and beautiful, when looking at them  
I think of those intense rains  
that transform them into deep oceans  
of the imagination.  
Sewer water, on my way home from school,  
day by day, while school waited,  
obeying the itinerary marked  
by electrical cables,  
pathways alongside the highway  
that leads to the center of town,  
to the bus station's small screen  
where father and son went to see the episode  
nights on which the blackout extended like a great blemish  
on every side.





Y eran aquellas luces,  
las que permanecían haciendo de sus contornos  
el paraíso de los tuertos,  
las luces que marcaban la diferencia,  
el anuncio de que la sangre buscaría  
un mundo distinto  
que no precisamente tenía que ver  
con una ciudad luminosa  
sino con aquello que nacía en la zanja despegando  
*a los archipiélagos siderales.*  
Y entre las luces iba dibujándose una puerta  
y al abrirse la puerta comenzaba un túnel  
por donde fui tanteando lo que me separaba del resto,  
y mientras escuchaba una voz desconocida  
los impulsos me llevaron al borde de un precipicio.  
Y aunque en verdad no sabía  
yo buscaba más allá de los límites del pizarrón,  
del humanismo engolado y doctrinal,  
de la etiqueta almidonada.

Crucé el parque con un pelado estrambótico,  
los pantalones tubos y mis botas rusas,  
traspasé la reja de la mayoría de edad  
que establecía el Club Juvenil,  
bajaron por la antena canciones  
y locutores prohibidos,  
viaje en vagones y rastras del centro al occidente...  
Yo seguía buscando  
y como quien responde a una extraña poema  
y continué buscando hasta decir:

Aguas albañales desbordándose,  
arrastrando en su paso turbulento  
todo aquello que supera mis pretensiones.





And it was those lights,  
tracing in their silhouettes  
the paradise of those who are blind in one eye,  
lights that signaled something different,  
a sign for which blood searches  
a different world  
that didn't have to be  
a luminous city  
but had to do with what was born in the ditch  
undoing *the sidereal archipelago*.  
And through these lights a door could be seen  
and when the door opened a tunnel appeared  
where I began to feel what separated me from others,  
and as I listened to an unknown voice  
my impulses carried me to the edge of a precipice.  
And although I knew nothing  
I searched beyond the blackboard's edges,  
beyond a haughty doctrinal humanism,  
beyond the starched label.

I crossed the park with my outlandish haircut,  
tube pants and Russian boots,  
I breached the barrier of adulthood  
established by the Youth Club,  
prohibited messages and songs  
sounding through the antennas,  
traveled in wagons and carts to the center of the Western World...  
I kept on searching  
and like someone responding to a strange question  
I rose and wrote my first poem  
and searched some more until I said:

Overflowing sewer waters,  
carrying in their turbulent path  
all that surpasses my pretensions.









# ABOUT THIS VOLUME





**ISRAEL DOMÍNGUEZ** was born in Placetas, Villa Clara, in 1973. Throughout his childhood his father recited poetry, and he and his mother often accompanied him to his performances. By the time Domínguez graduated from the University of Havana in 1996, his family had moved to Matanzas and he joined them there. His work has been awarded numerous prizes. Among his poetry collections are: *Hojas de cal* (2001), *Collage mientras avanza mi carro de equipaje* (2002), *Sobre un fondo de arena* (2004), *Después de acompañar a William Jones* (2007), and *Viaje de regreso* (2018/2011). In an interview, Domínguez has said: “Memory is a return trip, inherent of course to the human being. In my poetry it is not simply an instrument but also its landscape, that is to say, a poetic event [ . . . ] It’s not a matter of reducing memory to its individual manifestation because collective memory influences the individual and viceversa.” Domínguez lives in Matanzas, where he also works as a translator. Like so many others, his professional life has been affected by Cuba’s precarious economy; for a number of years, and because he could earn so much more in the tourism sector, he quit a job in his profession to take one as a bellboy at a hotel on Varadero Beach. The experience provided material for a book of poems. Happily, he is once more working in his chosen field. [photo by Margaret Randall]



**MARGARET RANDALL** (translator, b. New York, 1936) is a poet, essayist, oral historian, translator, photographer and social activist. She lived in Latin America for 23 years (in Mexico, Cuba, and Nicaragua). From 1962 to 1969 she and Mexican poet Sergio Mondragón co-edited *EL CORNO EMPLUMADO / THE PLUMED HORN*, a bilingual literary quarterly that published some of the best new work of the sixties. When she came home in 1984, the government ordered her deported because it found some of her writing to be “against the good order and happiness of the United States”. With the support of many writers and others, she won her case in 1989. Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, she taught at several universities. Randall’s most recent titles include *CHE ON MY MIND*, *HAYDEE SANTAMARIA*, *CUBAN REVOLUTIONARY: SHE LED BY TRANSGRESSION*, *THE MORNING AFTER: POETRY AND PROSE IN A POST-TRUTH WORLD*, and *EXPORTING REVOLUTION: CUBA’S GLOBAL SOLIDARITY*. Randall has also devoted herself to translation, producing *ONLY THE ROAD / SOLO EL CAMINO*, an anthology of eight decades of Cuban poetry, and individual volumes by Laura Ruiz Montes, Alfredo Zaldivar, Yanira Marimón and Reynaldo García Blanco, among others. In addition to *VIAJE DE REGRESO / RETURN TRIP*, The Operating System has published her translations of books by Gregory Randall, Rita Valdivia and Chely Lima. In 2017 Randall was awarded Chihuahua, Mexico’s Medal of Literary Merit. She lives in New Mexico with her partner (now wife) of more than 30 years, the painter Barbara Byers, and travels extensively to read, lecture and teach.



[photo by Chris Felver]

## GLOSSARIUM: UNSILENCED TEXTS AND MODERN TRANSLATIONS

The Operating System's *Glossarium: Unsilenced Texts* series was established in early 2016 in an effort to recover silenced voices outside and beyond the familiar poetic canon, seeking out and publishing both contemporary translations and little known (and unknown) out of print texts, in particular those under siege by restrictive regimes and silencing practices in their home (or adoptive) countries.

The term "Glossarium" derives from latin/greek and is defined as "a collection of glosses or explanations of words, especially of words not in general use, as those of a dialect, locality or an art or science, or of particular words used by an old or a foreign author." The series was initiated by and is curated by Managing Editor Lynne DeSilva-Johnson, with the help of a wide range of global allies and friends.

Ashraf Fayadh's "Instructions Within," in a full Arabic-English dual-language translation, was the first book in this series, preceding Gregory Randall's award winning memoir of life in Cuba, "*To Have Been There Then (Estar Allí Entonces)*". Three additional parallel Spanish-English translations by Margaret Randall have followed: Chely Lima's "*Lo Que Les Dijo El Licántropo / What the Werewolf Told Them*"; "*La Comandante Maya: On the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Death in Bolivia of Ernesto Che Guevara*" [a chapbook of poems by Rita Valdivia, who died in combat fighting alongside Che just before her 23rd birthday]. and "*Viaje de Regreso / Return Trip*," this dual language edition of Cuban poet Israel Domínguez's striking poetry, with a beautiful cover featuring Havana street art by Jose Parla and JR.

2018 will also see a Farsi-English dual language edition of Mehdi Navid's novelette, "*The Book of Sounds*," with translation by Tina Rahimi and with cover art by Iranian artist Iman Raad. Additional dual language editions in Polish, Italian, French, Russian, and another Farsi title are currently in review.

Also released as part of the series in 2017 is an expanded edition of *Flower World Variations*, an out of print collaborative volume from the mid 1980's of Jerome Rothenberg's Yaqui deer dance translations alongside drawings from digital art innovator Harold Cohen; the new edition also includes an essay from Cohen and additional volume notes from Rothenberg. It was released in New York City at Howl Happening with a bilingual reading of the Deer Dance Variations, with Cecilia Vicuña reading her Spanish translations of the text alongside Jerry's text from the book.

## WHY PRINT DOCUMENT ?

*The Operating System uses the language “print document” to differentiate from the book-object as part of our mission to distinguish the act of documentation-in-book-FORM from the act of publishing as a backwards facing replication of the book’s agentive \*role\* as it may have appeared the last several centuries of its history. Ultimately, I approach the book as TECHNOLOGY: one of a variety of printed documents (in this case bound) that humans have invented and in turn used to archive and disseminate ideas, beliefs, stories, and other evidence of production.*

*Ownership and use of printing presses and access to (or restriction of) printed materials has long been a site of struggle, related in many ways to revolutionary activity and the fight for civil rights and free speech all over the world. While (in many countries) the contemporary quotidian landscape has indeed drastically shifted in its access to platforms for sharing information and in the widespread ability to “publish” digitally, even with extremely limited resources, the importance of publication on physical media has not diminished. In fact, this may be the most critical time in recent history for activist groups, artists, and others to insist upon learning, establishing, and encouraging personal and community documentation practices. Hear me out.*

*With The OS’s print endeavors I wanted to open up a conversation about this: the ultimately radical, transgressive act of creating PRINT /DOCUMENTATION in the digital age. It’s a question of the archive, and of history: who gets to tell the story, and what evidence of our life, our behaviors, our experiences are we leaving behind? We can know little to nothing about the future into which we’re leaving an unprecedentedly digital document trail — but we can be assured that publications, government agencies, museums, schools, and other institutional powers that be will continue to leave BOTH a digital and print version of their production for the official record. Will we?*

*As a (rogue) anthropologist and long time academic, I can easily pull up many accounts about how lives, behaviors, experiences — how THE STORY of a time or place — was pieced together using the deep study of correspondence, notebooks, and other physical documents which are no longer the norm in many lives and practices. As we move our creative behaviors towards digital note taking, and even audio and video, what can we predict about future technology that is in any way assuring that our stories will be accurately told – or told at all? How will we leave these things for the record?*

*In these documents we say:*

*WE WERE HERE, WE EXISTED, WE HAVE A DIFFERENT STORY*

*— Lynne DeSilva-Johnson, Founder/Managing Editor,  
THE OPERATING SYSTEM, Brooklyn NY 2016*

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## TITLES IN THE PRINT: DOCUMENT COLLECTION

An Absence So Great and Spontaneous It Is Evidence of Light - Anne Gorrick [2018]  
The Book of Everyday Instruction - Chloe Bass [2018]  
Executive Orders Vol. 2 - a collaboration with the Organism for Poetic Research [2018]  
One More Revolution - Andrea Mazzariello [2018]  
The Suitcase Tree - Filip Marinovich [2018]  
Chlorosis - Michael Flatt and Derrick Mund [2018]  
Sussuros a Mi Padre - Erick Sáenz [2018]  
Sharing Plastic - Blake Nemeč [2018]  
The Book of Sounds - Mehdi Navid (Farsi dual language, trans. Tina Rahimi) [2018]  
In Corpore Sano : Creative Practice and the Challenged Body [Anthology, 2018]; Lynne DeSilva-Johnson & Jay Besemer, Eds.  
Abandoners - Lesley Ann Wheeler [2018]  
Jazzercise is a Language - Gabriel Ojeda-Sague [2018]  
Death is a Festival - Anis Shivani [2018]  
Return Trip / Viaje Al Regreso; Dual Language Edition -  
Israel Dominguez,(trans. Margaret Randall) [2018]  
Born Again - Ivy Johnson [2018]  
Attendance - Rocío Carlos and Rachel McLeod Kaminer [2018]  
Singing for Nothing - Wally Swist [2018]  
Walking Away From Explosions in Slow Motion - Gregory Crosby [2018]  
CHAPBOOK SERIES 2018 : Greater Grave - Jacq Greyja; Needles of Itching Feathers - Jared Schlickling;  
Want-Catcher - Adra Raine; We, The Monstrous - Mark DuCharme

Lost City Hydrothermal Field - Peter Milne Greiner [2017]  
An Exercise in Necromancy - Patrick Roche [Bowery Poetry Imprint, 2017]  
Love, Robot - Margaret Rhee[2017]  
La Comandante Maya - Rita Valdivia (dual language, trans. Margaret Randall) [2017]  
The Furies - William Considine [2017]  
Nothing Is Wasted - Shabnam Piryaee [2017]  
Mary of the Seas - Joanna C. Valente [2017]  
Secret-Telling Bones - Jessica Tyner Mehta [2017]  
CHAPBOOK SERIES 2017 : INCANTATIONS  
*featuring original cover art by Barbara Byers*  
sp. - Susan Charkes; Radio Poems - Jeffrey Cyphers Wright; Fixing a Witch/Hexing the Stitch - Jacklyn Janeksela; cosmos a  
personal voyage by carl sagan ann druyan steven sotor and me - Connie Mae Oliver  
Flower World Variations, Expanded Edition/Reissue - Jerome  
Rothenberg and Harold Cohen [2017]  
What the Werewolf Told Them / Lo Que Les Dijo El Licántropo - Chely Lima (trans. Margaret Randall) [2017]  
The Color She Gave Gravity - Stephanie Heit [2017]  
The Science of Things Familiar - Johnny Damm [Graphic Hybrid, 2017]  
agon - Judith Goldman [2017]  
To Have Been There Then / Estar Allí Entonces - Gregory Randall (trans. Margaret Randall) [2017]

Instructions Within - Ashraf Fayadh [2016] Arabic-English dual language edition; Mona Kareem, translator  
Let it Die Hungry - Caitis Meissner [2016]  
A GUN SHOW - Adam Sliwinski and Lynne DeSilva-Johnson;  
So Percussion in Performance with Ain Gordon and Emily Johnson [2016]  
Everybody's Automat [2016] - Mark Gurarie  
How to Survive the Coming Collapse of Civilization [2016] - Sparrow  
CHAPBOOK SERIES 2016: OF SOUND MIND  
*\*featuring the quilt drawings of Daphne Taylor*  
Improper Maps - Alex Crowley; While Listening - Alaina Ferris;  
Chords - Peter Longofono; Any Seam or Needlework - Stanford Cheung

TEN FOUR - Poems, Translations, Variations [2015]- Jerome Rothenberg, Ariel Resnikoff, Mikhl Likht  
MARILYN [2015] - Amanda Ngoho Reavey  
CHAPBOOK SERIES 2015: OF SYSTEMS OF  
*\*featuring original cover art by Emma Steinkraus*  
Cyclorama - Davy Knittle; The Sensitive Boy Slumber Party Manifesto - Joseph Cuillier;  
Neptune Court - Anton Yakovlev; Schema - Anurak Saelow  
SAY/MIRROR [2015; 2nd edition 2016] - JP HOWARD  
Moons Of Jupiter/Tales From The Schminke Tub [plays, 2014] - Steve Danziger

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2014: BY HAND

Pull, A Ballad - Maryam Parhizkar; Can You See that Sound - Jeff Musillo  
Executive Producer Chris Carter - Peter Milne Greiner;  
Spooky Action at a Distance - Gregory Crosby;

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2013: WOODBLOCK

*\*featuring original prints from Kevin William Reed*  
Strange Coherence - Bill Considine; The Sword of Things - Tony Hoffman;  
Talk About Man Proof - Lancelot Runge / John Kropa;  
An Admission as a Warning Against the Value of Our Conclusions - Alexis Quinlan



## DOC U MENT

/däkyämənt/

First meant “instruction” or “evidence,” whether written or not.

*noun* - a piece of written, printed, or electronic matter that provides information or evidence or that serves as an official record  
*verb* - record (something) in written, photographic, or other form  
*synonyms* - paper - deed - record - writing - act - instrument

[Middle English, *precept*, from Old French, from Latin *documentum*, example, proof, from *docere*, to teach; see *dek-* in Indo-European roots.]

### Who is responsible for the manufacture of value?

Based on what supercilious ontology have we landed in a space where we vie against other creative people in vain pursuit of the fleeting credibilities of the scarcity economy, rather than freely collaborating and sharing openly with each other in ecstatic celebration of MAKING?

While we understand and acknowledge the economic pressures and fear-mongering that threatens to dominate and crush the creative impulse,  
 we also believe that *now more than ever*  
*we have the tools to relinquish agency via cooperative means,*  
 fueled by the fires of the Open Source Movement.

Looking out across the invisible vistas of that rhizomatic parallel country  
 we can begin to see our community beyond constraints,  
 in the place where intention meets  
 resilient, proactive, collaborative organization.

Here is a document born of that belief, sown purely of imagination and will.  
 When we document we assert.  
 We print to make real, to reify our being there.  
 When we do so with mindful intention to address our process,  
 to open our work to others, to create beauty in words in space,  
 to respect and acknowledge the strength of the page we now hold physical,  
 a thing in our hand... we remind ourselves that, like Dorothy:  
*we had the power all along, my dears.*

### THE PRINT! DOCUMENT SERIES

*is a project of*

the trouble with bartleby

*in collaboration with*

the operating system

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