



Virgil Suárez

Mercado - Madrid, 1972

Deep under the city, pass beggars
and their dirty children, pass the blind
loteria vendor with clouds for eyes –
deeper still, the market: all the fruit,
vegetables, tubers, legumbres, cold
cuts, and shops, all you-can-eat
for pesetas. Carcasses of rabbits
and goats upside down like shirts
dangled to dry on clotheslines,
the lure of mussels and clams, the pink
of shaved pigskin, feet and offal,
rainbow shimmer of light against
the mackerel, sardine, and smelt
scales, scales like confetti speckled
on the wet black floors. Bonbons
made at the chocolate shops,
liqueur filled, the smell of dried cod,
Serrano ham hung from the rafters,
everywhere wine, grapes, shiny olives . . .
Tight, my mother holds my hand
as we walk through and though we
don't have much to spend, every few
shops or so she says, See all that?
That's abundance, freedom. This
is why we left Cuba. A fruit vendor
hands me a shiny apple. I bite into
it, taste its juices, this world
of sweetness for the first time;
who can forget the price of freedom?

> Ilustración: Ramón Alejandro



Havana Blue

This city will always need work, hands upon it,
calloused, a sheet of sandpaper to scratch its own
back, what my mother calls “el desrumba”, flecks
of paint everywhere, a riddle for the ashen birds.

This city will always need old men, children
in uniform, a knot of banyan tendrils at the park,
a white-wash glare, broken glass, windows agape
like the mouths of its citizens. Music fills empty

spaces, dead hours blue with boredom. Mojito rum
scents hallways, porticos, a bricolage of grid-iron.
The sea keeps this scent of blanched sky, birds
soar for morsels. A litany of rumors, a clatter

of jackhammers in the moonlight. Slackened days,
an ebb, a tug of plunder, what the carpenter knows
of wood, a termite's solemnity in dark crevices,
pockets of light and shadows. This city will always

stand erect, no matter its conquered history.
A man can either aim for the moon, or canoe
across its bay to cast empty nets. Questions
are for the restless, answers come to those drowning.

Verdigris Cuban

a V where frogs hide in the daylight
this crevice so green it turns blue

a vortex of sea and sky, soldiers
waiting in rain in country, limbs

embracing water, leaves cupping
mist-prayers. A little irascible,

feisty-feeding off tree barks, bugs,
this game of when to come down,

take cities, rule –some call this
act of disappearance “el abracadabra

del cuerpo”– bodies in motion
through deep, thick foliage.

One minute you are here, the next
a parrot gives your position away.

Verdant. Verdigris. Verdeolivo.
An island giving birth to green, always.

The Exile Speaks

of a red tongue, black words
a necessary longing for shadow,

a corpuscle, a dangled leaf
from a spider web's thread,

useless hands, fingers claw
any dirt, seeds bloom into fists

an anger never allowed to ebb
dreams of rotted, worm infested

pulp, all that tastes bitter, “agrijo”
like bile, a regurgitation of lost

steps. Why not forget? Teeth
chatter in cold night air, dentures

in a glass. Away from the mouth,
teeth sing to all those about to drown.

The What of Rocks

Everywhere I travel I stop to pick up a rock,
a hard-kept promise to my mother who needs
the foundation of hard things in my life,
some certainty at my hand. So I walk, keep
my eye on the ground –a red-ticked pebble
here, an ochre-hued, polished stone there.
I gather them at night in darkness, only
then do they feel smooth enough to carry
back. They are the eyes of my father
in moonlight. I want to say rocks know
the truth about a wicked tongue. Some,
and I know this is far-fetched, blink
at me, wink as if in approval. “Pick me,”
says the one near the tree. “I weigh
nothing, for in me is the hollow air you
need.” A rock held in the night does feel
as light as a dead feather, a tongue gone dry,
a mouth so thirsty for words that when
you say “rock”, something grounds you
to the spot though it could simply be
the earth mistaking you for its own hunger.

Virgil Suárez nació en La Habana, en 1962. Desde 1974 reside en los Estados Unidos. Ha escrito veinte libros, de poesía y prosa, (**Infinite Refuge**; **Palms Crows**; **Banyan**; **Guide to the Blue Tongue**.) Ha sido co-editor de cuatro antologías publicadas por **University of Iowa Press**. Actualmente escribe una novela y se dedica a restaurar un Chevrolet del 55