

## BAR DOS HERMANOS

Sip a mojito in the bar across from the customs house  
and remember Federico García Lorca. His culture was in  
his veins. He saw though doctrine, let surprise open  
into desire, sought the spark beneath the obvious,  
found his own symbols to make the world new.

*Verde que te quiero verde!*

Trees begin to sway, dance halls fill, the chapel  
does a cha cha cha. Ladies' fans open with musk,  
lemon drifts from the black capes of their suitors.

Lorca sat in this tavern once, calling up  
the smooth-grained labia of calla lilies carved around  
La Dolorosa on her altar —how they roused the Duende  
from his blood, how the lacquered fish became  
a compass of light around her face.

He divided the glare of the sea  
through the saloon-door slats into stanzas,  
one for each river of a street he walked to meet  
the luminous boats in the harbor, the carnal tide,  
aroma of struggle, quick whisper of sorrow.

## HASTA GUANABACOA

In sifting rain we board the ferry  
behind a lady whose dress is all pockets: blue candles,  
zinc amulets, pink gladiolas.

Across the bay, a chapel sits like a tavern  
entombed with incense, rum, votive wax.  
When I climb the steps and bow to the dark saint  
in her alcove of honey and white sails, doves burst  
into a wine-colored fan.

Here nobody is more than anybody else.  
The bride purifying herself on the kneeler  
wears see-through lace. A man bent like a weathervane  
creates a breeze with his supplication. A niña  
half-hidden in her mother's folds gives me her eyes,  
and with them her poverty.

Back on the sea, my head turns in circles, triumphs  
with doubt, holds close these moments  
where one soul becomes another  
and a new self embarks.

## FERNANDO, TOBACCO FARMER

*Gracias por su ayuda*, he said, leaning into me  
from his perch on the arm of my wooden rocker—  
well, his rocker —after all, we were on his front porch  
among *mogotes* and fields of tobacco.  
He appeared on the trail we walked  
which turned out to be his back yard, his farm,  
and invited us to his house, just like that.

Campesino Fernando with his blazing blue eyes  
and tattered plaid shirt, his crooked smile.  
He made piña coladas with and without rum,  
frothy and delicious —I took mine with—  
then sat beside me and plunked  
two stacks of dried leaves into my lap,  
telling us all (by then others had gathered)  
how tobacco is grown, cutting it  
into three long splices, removing the central vein,  
rolling it into one perfect cigar.

Then looking down at my thighs  
overflowing with his leaves  
he laughed and lit the cigar,  
passing it to me and my lips.  
I felt like I could walk into that life,  
wake up in his simple whitewashed house,  
call it home.

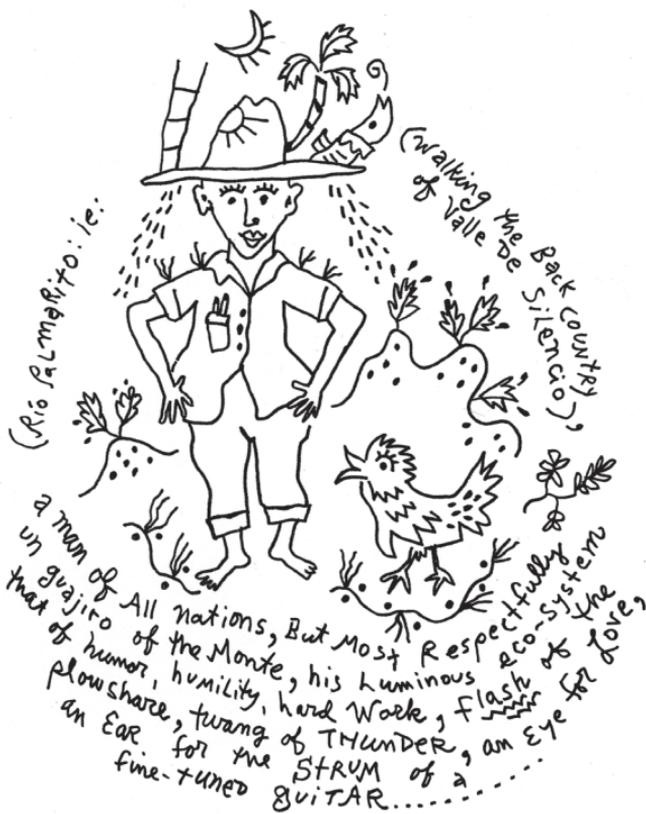
## THE CUBAN WORD BRIGADE

Byzantine light off the guitar-shaped bay  
through tall colonial doors of a workshop  
where ladies of the Word Brigade stitch poems  
between rough-cut covers of one-of-a-kind books.

Musicality to their effort.  
A chiming sparkle to each hand-sewn verse.  
Red iron-oxide brushed on mothwing parchment  
dusted with crushed seashell. Fish scales gleaming  
from freshly-glued spines of Neruda and Mistral.

Under cover, beyond headlines  
above the chain of command, these women  
hands to the task, bring light from the word.

Into the night they print, sew, collate and bind  
until the fluttering lamplight dims, the sun rises  
over the rusted drawbridge, the bicycle vendor  
warms his hands around a too-thin baguette  
and the moored city awakens.



## SWIMMING CUBA

a woman's distorted reflection  
in the bevelled glass door

photos of young revolutionaries  
in black and white

a whole park for John Lennon

a Bucanero followed by a dark pull  
of coffee at the peso bar

thunder on Mori's back patio  
and the long bunch of bananas slowly ripening

21 bridges over the Ríos Yumurí and San Juan  
more thunder, such a pouring-down

I was looking outside myself, then in,  
thinking these might be signs for the road ahead—

Beyond the tepid air of sea  
the endless honking  
a waitress holding a tray above her head  
for an umbrella  
birdsong behind diesel crank

her brown legs  
his white hat  
how we were "his first Americans"

I feel a different rhythm now—  
like backstroking in a wide sea  
without the measure of a pool's rope—

how profound it actually is to be happy.