Festival de la Palabra

encuentro mundial de escritores y lectores

CUNY

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Festival de la Palabra of Puerto Rico in New York

Lehman College/Hostos Community College

Text Handbook

**Edited by Charlie Vázquez*

October 10-11, 2012

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Julio Ricardo Varela

Excerpt from *Franky Benítez*
Prologue:
Fall, 1996

Imagine Franky Benítez hiding on a subway platform in Boston and humming the song his father improvised twenty years ago outside a cinema in Santurce.

We love you, Franky. Oh yes we do. We love you, Franky. We love you true. When you're not with me, We're blue. Oh, Franky, we love you.

And as he hums, Franky Benítez enters a green trolley that cradles him back to his days of final comfort: August, 1976, the rear of a station wagon, sucking on a bottle of chocolate milk.

His abuelo drives. His mother smokes. A week had passed since the judge formally decreed his parents' divorce, and now here was Franky Benítez, his mother and his baby sister, three passengers checking into Eastern Airlines Flight 17 nonstop to El Bronx, Nueva York.

On the road to the airport, men shout, hawking fruits and fried meats. The traffic crawls. His mother lights up, smoke creaks out the window of the station wagon, flowing past the condominiums, past the beach and into the Caribbean. Once, she thinks, this island of Puerto Ricans and Americans, blacks, blondes and those in between, Cuban exiles and Dominicans, enchanted her with a home where kids played in pools and parents danced all night. But now? Seven years had passed, and her seven-year-old son, her prince, her Franky, still drank chocolate milk from a baby's bottle.

Right then Franky Benítez climbs over the back seat of the station wagon, careful not to kick his baby sister, who sleeps on a blanket and seatbelts. As he sees his mother smoke away tears, he leans over and kisses her on the cheek.

"Mamita, when I get back to Puerto Rico, I want to help you paint the house, okay?"

Think of how the green trolley stops at Boylston Street, and how

others jolt silent curses. Behind a line of B trains, and C trains and D trains, the trolley halts. Franky turns to see the dim Boylston station. It had changed very little since college—the still gray, the rusty green, the old Chinese woman sitting on the middle bench, clutching to shopping bags full of soda cans, teenagers smoking in back corners, vagrants lingering near the token booth. Maybe a hundred years ago, when this city was smaller and people were amazed that you could go from one end of Boston Common to the other in an electric car, maybe then the Boylston stop made sense. But now, who gets off at Boylston Street?

Franky Benítez had figured it all out, and when he calculated the numbers, he felt like a Rain Man: people who like routine, read the *Globe* for 50 years and buy the same cup of coffee from the same corner store in some part of Fields Corner or Jamaica Plain or Somerville. The same people take the same train every day for 520 days a year, give a holiday or two, 5,200 days a decade, 26,000 a half-century, 52,000 days a century. And as he waits, Franky figures, if 100 people took the same train for 46 years, they would be in that train 2,392,000 times.

The trolley moves. Relief? Escape? Security? It's only work, a place to drain his time. Now imagine this scene: the trolley moves, the people cheer. The trolley accelerates, Franky begins to holler. He jumps to the front and begs the conductor to barrel-ass all the stops: Arlington, Copley Square, Hynes Convention Center, Kenmore Square, all the way to Cleveland Circle, where the trolley combusts and all the grief, the tedium, the anxiety vanishes and Franky Benítez is at peace again. ◆

Rosa Beltrán

"Scherehezade,"
from *Points of Departure: New Stories from Mexico (City Lights, 2001)*

I have a lover twenty-four years older than I am who has taught me two things. One, that there can be no true passion if one does not cross some limit, and two, that an older man can only offer you his money or his sympathy. Rex does not give me money or sympathy. That is why he says that our passion, which has transcended limits, is in danger of beginning to extinguish itself at any moment.

First night: Before meeting him, I had attended two book presentations and nothing had ever happened, which is just so many words, because actually it's when nothing happens that things are really happening. And that time they happened as follows: I was alone, in the middle of a crowded room, asking myself why I had decided to torture myself that way, when I realized that Rex, a famous writer I knew only by name, was seated next to me. When the first participant's reading was over, I applauded. Next thing I knew, Rex raised his hand, rebuked the participant, and took his seat once again. With very few variations, this was the dynamic of that presentation: papers were read, followed by applause, and Rex either praised or destroyed the speaker, always commenting with quotes from one of the great figures he kept handy.

Someone read, Rex criticized, another read, Rex criticized, I applauded. If minimalism is foresight and the reduction of elements to their lowest possible number of variables, this was the most minimalist presentation I had ever been to. The penultimate presentation by a feminist author having ended, Rex criticized, I applauded and went to the ladies room. I heard him say that human stupidity could sink no lower. When I got back, before the event had led, I noticed that Rex had his hand on my chair and was distractedly coning with someone. When I pointed to the place where I'd been

sitting— which his autonomous, palpitating hand now guarded like a crab—Rex looked me in the eye and said, "I put it there to keep it warm." Two hours later we were making love, frantically. That's what they say: "frantically." Also: "madly." In love, borrowed phrases are everything, and you can never be sure saying what you want when you love. But, when you want with all your heart not to be there and cannot do it, what do you say then?

Third night: The first thing I must admit is that I don't know very well what nihilistic decadence consists of, because before meeting Rex I had not thought about it. According to him, the term defines Generation X, the most decadent and luckless generation of this century, to which I unfortunately belong. But if I wanted to follow the plan of action I should follow according to Rex, I could regret one act: having sat next to him, such a famous writer, at a book citation. The golden rule among people who attend this kind of event is no one should get involved with anyone else, and that friendships, if any developed, should be based upon the purest self-interest (I give you, you give me; I introduce you, you introduce me; I read you, you read me) or total disregard. Rex says that any relationship that isn't a result of alcohol is false.

Tenth night: This had been going on since the first time, but I had forgotten to mention it. We were in the climactic moment, making love frantically, as I have said, and suddenly the room was full of visitors. The first to arrive was She of the Extremely Narrow Waist. Rex began talking about this old lover of his because my posture reminded him of her. She was decisive, ardent, and a brunette. You had to grasp her tightly by the waist because if not she was likely to fall off. "Like this," he said, squeezing me. "Oh, how that woman could move up and down," he added, while holding on to me, nostalgic. But after a while, he pointed his index finger and warned me:

"Many may imitate her, but no one can equal her, no one."

And, sunk in this reflection, he went to pour himself a whiskey. After a few minutes during which I, who had also lapsed into a kind of dream state, was pondering the great passion between Rex and me, he broke the silence:

"She could squat perfectly," he said, referring to that other woman, "Look, I get goose bumps when I remember it."

It was true: the sickly white skin, untouched by the sun for years, had little pointy lumps all over it.

"Like a flesh piston," he said, as if in a trance, "up and down, beside herself, over me, emitting impeccable cries."

According to Rex, that squatting woman's performance art was excellent. She made him reach the heavens, without any exaggeration, six times. The very day she gave herself to him, before leaving, She of the Extremely Narrow Waist asked him to make love to her from behind.

"She wanted to make me an offering," Rex explained, "a gift."

After this confession, which seemed quite strange to me, there was another silence. I thought Rex's story was an indirect way of asking me for something, so I wrapped my arms around a pillow and offered myself, on my hands and knees, with my back to him. "Don't move," he said, and in a few seconds I saw a camera flash. I waited a bit longer, but nothing happened, and after a few anxious moments, I heard someone next to me snoring. ◆

Luis Negrón

Excerpt from *Mundo Cruel*
Translation ©2012 by Suzanne Jill Levine
(forthcoming from Seven Stories Press, February 2013)

JUNITO

Yo, Junito. What's up? How are you, bro? You know, still hanging in there. Tomorrow I'm leaving, you know, and this guy from La Colectora wants to buy my car and I told him I couldn't give it to him until today, but he wanted to check it out with his brother-in-law who's a mechanic. On foot bro, how else? I'm going over to the old lady's house to say goodbye and pick up some things that she wants to send to my brother. It's been years since I've taken one of these buses. Which is the one you take to Parada 26? Ah, okay, thanks, it's seventy-five cents, right? So tell me, man, what's up? Hell, it must be at least a year since we talked. You know how it is. You fool around too much, then you get married and you gotta work and all that shit and, bro, there's no more time for anything. You better believe it, bro, that's why I'm out of here. It's all one big pain in the ass, and bringing up kids here, man, forget it. Yeah, two boys, the oldest is ten and the other one's nine...no way, she had the operation. I signed the consent. You know, things are tough and you can't keep having kids. We wanted a girl to have the little pair of 'em, you know? But instead we got another boy. It's okay, this way they can keep each other company, and, you know, defend each other...

No, not New York, no. We're going to Boston. I mean, it's above Boston. See my brother, Samuel, the oldest, the darker one, works in a factory there and they need people. He talked to the boss, and so that's where I'm going. I'm going ahead and later, once I score an apartment, I'll send for my wife and the boys. She's happy about it, the boys are the ones who are afraid because of English and all that, but you'll see, they'll learn fast.... Me, I talk pollito chicken, you know, Spanglish, but I get by. If they talk to me slow I can follow but when they start talking fast with all that guachulín, man, that's where they lose me. But, you know, in the factory there are lots of

Latinos, besides everybody there speaks Spanish. Even in the stores, Samuel says.

And how about you, bro? Going to work? That's good. You studied and got a nice little job with the government, man, that's cool. Today those are the steadiest and you don't have to work yourself to death either…yeah bro, nice and easy...

Junito, listen, sorry for saying this, but really, bro, if I was you I'd get the hell out of here. You know what I mean. People fuck with you here and they stick their nose in your business. I mean you, well educated and all, should blow this place. Man, I see things, and I know people, the ones who stand on corners and fuck with you. Junito this, Junito that. Just the day before yesterday, some jerk there at the rotary was talking shit about you and I said to him, bro, leave him alone, he hasn't done nothing to you, and then they started fucking with me, asking am I your husband, am I a trick, and me, man, I told them to go to hell and I went home real mad. Listen, leave people alone, if that's the way they are then fuck everybody else, as long as they treat me with respect, no problem. Besides, people got sons and you never know how they're going to turn out. That's why I'm telling you, Junito, leave here, man. Listen, the other day I was taking a walk around the Condado and, man, there were a lot of them there. I mean, there were some that were real built, you always notice something a little weird, but, man, there were guys who looked real good, you know. It looks like they all move to the same area and so it's easier for them to meet each other there. Yeah, you should go there.

But for Christ's sake, Junito, your mom made her life, you have to go out on your own. Besides, you have more brothers and they can share the work taking care of her. Don't screw yourself out of pity, man, you've got to live your own life.

I'm talking to you like this, man, because I'm sure of what I am. You know I don't like that whole scene, but I believe in live and let live. I mean, bro, things change; this is a different world. Do you get cable? They show lots of things, I mean, like, on Showtime they even kiss each other and everything.

One sec, Junito...yo, Cristobal, hey baby, you know you're mine. Tomorrow's the day. No, my little brother is taking me to the air-

port...yeah, to Boston. No, man, to stay. Anyway, I'll come down later to say goodbye to the boys. Ok, see you there. Take care.

Nothing to be afraid of, we always fuck around like that...so yeah, man. Ah yeah, so they kiss and everything, and they look normal. If you saw them on the street you wouldn't think they belong to the other team. It's just that on the outside there's more freedom for that kinda thing...I think they even get married...and have kids and everything.

I remember, bro, when we were kids, you know, I'd fuck with you a lot. 'Cause I was ignorant, man. Repeating the same shit everyone else said, but look, you ended up better than all of us and the ones that give you a hard time nowadays…it's because they're jealous.

You wonder why I know so much about all this shit, man...keep this to yourself, bro, I'm gonna tell you something I never told nobody...see, my youngest boy, well, he's just like you. I'm telling you, ever since he was real little I'd watch him and watch him and, pam! You know what I mean. At first that shit bothered me like crazy... he's my son and I know that people like him suffer a lot...I'm telling you, Junito, I'll kill the motherfucker who says anything to my son. One day the older kid started saying shit to him and I stopped him. This is your brother and you and him got the same blood. If I catch you calling him faggot again I'm going to break your face, you heard me? It's not easy, you know, you can't know for sure, but I got a hunch. His mother doesn't say nothing about it, we don't talk about it, but I know she knows. ◆

Mayra Santos-Febres

Excerpt from "Faith in Disguise"

We were still lying on the floor that first time Faith invited me to see her in disguise, and I was tending to a small cut she had on her shoulder. She started talking, out of the blue. The sound of her own voice transported her, and the weight of her confession made her appear beautiful. In those moments, Faith became, for me, the most beautiful woman on the face of this earth.

"The nun told me, '*Menina*, go to the Sodality da Mercê. That is where they keep all of my great-grandmother's papers.'"

Faith paused in her confession, and along with it, the nun's. She caught her breath and the nun prepared to continue her story. It seemed as if it were she lying naked beside me, burning through me with her eyes; Faith's eyes, transfixed, were trying to interpret signs that vanished in midair. I was certain that such was the way that the nun had looked at Faith in Minas Gerais while she was relating her secret. And Faith, naked and trembling in my arms, was more than Faith: she was reunited, doubled. Astounded, I regarded the doubled pair that was confessing.

"My mother was a nun, and her mother a nun before her. And nevertheless I was born and so was my mother. So was my grandmother. All nuns and whores. Only I dared to break the cycle, more from shame than conviction. This I honestly tell you, *Menina*, because I am preparing to leave this earth. I am tired of seeing people wearing the habits of what they are not."

Faith turned sideways on the cold floor where we lay. She told me how she spent entire weeks going through the sodality's files, which were in a stiflingly hot attic. There she found letters signed by la Xica que Manda herself. She found account books and lists of purchases. And in that attic, behind a false wall, she found the dress. Excited, she

asked for permission to display it, which much to her surprise, was granted. But what surprised her even more was the single condition imposed in order for her to take the dress. She must never return it to the sodality. She must find a way to keep it, to secure a better place for its storage and care. The dress must never return to da Mercê.

The day before her departure, Faith returned to that attic, asking to be left alone with the dress. She caressed its soft cloth for hours, admiring its ample skirts of golden raw silk that had mysteriously survived the passage of time. Its hard bodice was designed to refine the waistline with a braided net of strings, which when tightened, would hamper breathing. Faith's eyes played over its long sleeves, down to the wrist. Wings of embroidery flowed at their end, forming the flight of a butterfly. The dress was undoubtedly authentic, made with the intention of reminding anybody who saw it or wore it of what true luxury and beauty were like.

Supporting the dress from beneath, however, was an odd and intricate net of metal strings and leather straps. The metal was exposed, with alarming ridges of rust visible within the harness. Faith caressed these, too. The metal cut her skin. Blood flowed. The harness's cold dry leather sucked in each drop until it became humid and tense, as if recovering from a long drought or satiating hunger. "Thank you," Faith found herself saying, not entirely aware of whom she was thanking for the experience, for her first cut. She sucked on the blemish until the blood stopped flowing and then proceeded to place the dress in the box, in which it would be transported safely to the Center's keep.

The famous exhibit of emancipated slaves opened its doors during the first week of November 1995. But, on October 31st, while people were donning their disguises and partying in blind celebration of that feast the pagans left us, Faith walked alone through the hallways of the Center, attending to the final details. Everybody was gone, she told me, still lying on the floor beside me. With her hands she proceeded to dress the dummy that would display the freed slave's dress. But she was unable to contain herself. She got naked there, alone, in the cold room of the Center.

She put on the embroidered hosiery, with the ribbons and undergarments. They fit her perfectly. Then she pulled the bodice over her. It was difficult to tie its braid of golden strings, but luckily they

attached at the front of the dress. Down fell the leather and metal harness, which rested coldly on Faith's hips. She could not resist the temptation of wearing it bare, without any underwear on. She then left the Center to roam the streets and did not return until her flesh was raw and burning. This was the first day of her ritual. This was the first night of this story that finds its end on the cold surface of this computer screen and the inscriptions of this pale skin. ◆

Orlando Ferrand

Excerpt from *Apologia, Cuban Childhood in My Backpack*
(Publish America, 2011)

Memories come in the form of my favorite objects: clothes and handwritten yellow manuscripts, which have always been my only indispensable companions. In those clothes, I dressed my skin to flesh out the characters on call. In those papers, I've named, described, and proclaimed my territories. I have become my memories, after all, in the languid form of words (…).

I am five years old. I'm in the Santiago de Cuba Carnival, one of the best carnivals in the world. I remembered being taken into Grandma's arms when I was about three years old, and Mom, disobeying my dad, had traveled to Santiago de Cuba to let Grandma bless me. I am vibrating with the sound of those ardent drums, the violins, and the Chinese trumpet that made its way into the Cuban cultural identity. Waves of harmoniously contrasting rhythms: the chino-cubano, the Afro-Cuban, the European—the altogether. The all-in-one. We are a real melting pot, at least in my world, in my multiethnic family reencountering itself during Carnival time. I remember the colors, colors that were always reinforced by my mother.

And the conga, that multiplicity of gestures and hip acrobatics…we couldn't talk; we would just sing along to the songs. Some made sense, some didn't. Improvisations. Sparks of the moment. A thousand people dance. The ancestral hoarding instinct bringing us together, since there was a prohibition concerning the gathering of people. No, we didn't have the freedom to congregate that we take for granted in America. But I can still taste the sweat coming down Grandma's big boobs like golden melons under a full moon. She would just twirl, carrying me in her arms, as in the waves of the ocean where she was from. Daughter of Yemayá. ◆

Álvaro Enrigue

Excerpt from *Gula, or: The Invocation*
Translated from the Spanish by Brendan Riley
(forthcoming in 2013)

One fine day, with no particular destination in mind, we decided to plan our escape from Mexico City. I could no longer stand anything about the capital. The ruling government, the opposition party, my coworkers, the neighbors, having to wait in lines at the bank to file my quarterly tax returns. As we had a little money saved up, we could move—without suffering too much—to some new and exciting foreign city. After shuffling through all kinds of possibilities we closed the discussion by settling on two possible locations: one, glamorous and risky, where we would continue living out our intensely literary life; the other, more secure, where I could work as a university professor. It was then July. We set our departure date for January and decided to let fate choose our destination.

Moving abroad is a lot more work than it seems: we ended up spending nine months getting almost everything in order. One day like any other, I ran into an old astrologer friend—as serious and professional as his job allows—in the produce aisle at the supermarket. Having studied the Greek classics, I've always been reluctant to visit him for advice. One time he even drew up my star chart but thanks to my fears we never sat down to consult it.

In the store he told me that he had been thinking about me and that perhaps it was time for us to have a consultation. So I went, hoping that the ancient superstition of astrology could help me arrange my life by revealing the city where our fortunes lay.

However, on my one and only visit to his reading room, I quickly learned the cold, hard truth that things as banal as places on the map don't show up in your horoscope. What appeared for me instead was a descent into hell that opened and closed with two deaths. First, a terrible one in February. Someone in your family, he

said, your mother, your son, Cathy, one of your brothers or sisters, and another later on, between April and August, which, if I didn't take precautions, would be mine.

There was also more bad news, although with fewer fatal details. You're going to lose your job in December, he told me by way of example. That's because I'm giving notice, I answered. I'm moving away in January. No, he insisted, they're going to fire you and you'll leave town after April. If you stay alive, that is. My favorite cat also showed up, an ill-tempered black Persian. There's an animal here, he told me, who seems to be the protector of your house. That's Gula, I told him. She'd give her life, he added, to save you or any of your family.

Now that we'd finished I asked him if there were anything that would work as a magic charm. We were staring out his office window at a horrible-looking street. You're a writer, aren't you? he answered. More or less, I told him. Write about it. Sometimes that can work like a lightning rod.

Remembering, like narrating, means creating order where none existed before. The truth is that my session with the astrologer was much more confusing and his statements far less clear. I left his office feeling disturbed by something but uncertain of what it was, like the way you feel after drinking too much coffee. Back home I gave my wife a deliberately abbreviated version of my reading, minus the disgraceful catastrophes. And because it's better to prevent than lament I began to write, almost secretly, a story about a cat that sacrifices itself for a man and his children.

December arrived and they fired me from the company where I'd worked for years. You'd said that you were leaving in January, so we made our own plans, the boss told me, trying to make it sound like it was nothing personal. As if it could not be. Around the beginning of February, during the same weeks when I was developing the story to deal with the cat's death, the police rang my doorbell in the middle of the night. They had my brother caged up in the back of the patrol car with a cracked sternum and fractured ribs. They brought him like that, and at such an unlikely hour, because in a near-fatal accident he'd flattened a lamppost: that constituted civil damages.

By that time we had already closed out our bank accounts, so I ran upstairs for a roll of cash. We settled on a price and I paid up. I

also handed out tips so that the police would forget our names and addresses forever.

When I returned home from the hospital many hours later, Cathy asked me if this had been the trouble I'd been expecting. What trouble? I asked her. What the astrologer predicted for you. Astrologers don't predict anything, I told her. My brother's going to be fine, don't worry. I left the story about the cat unfinished and went back to work on the book that I had to launch before we moved.

At last, my wife and I finished almost everything that we had begun in Mexico City, and in the middle of May, in a momentous move, we left the country with our little boy, our cat, and our piano. My second book had already gone on sale and our university jobs in the hardly glamorous city we'd moved to didn't begin until after August. So, before classes started, I worked on my story about the man and the cat. As much as I disliked the idea of having to finish writing its death, an overwhelming sense of metaphysical responsibility that I'd never felt before demanded I do it. You always have to finish what you start, especially if you're fighting astral bulls.

At the beginning of August we moved to our permanent address. There, Gula and I and our little boy began to enjoy spending time in the garden, a real novelty for us. At night I worked on the story about the cat and the man.

Gula, who'd always been insufferably independent, had no previous experience of nature. Now she spent entire days hunting mice and exploring trees: she'd never even seen one before. Meanwhile, I finally killed the cat in the book I was writing.

Within our imagination a magic spell is the court of last resort. It's also a threat that goes right on menacing us even though we might say otherwise: no one literally believes any more that invocations change the world, but we keep knocking on wood. One morning we noticed that Gula had not shown up to sleep in a few nights. I went down to the basement and found her—the epitome of feline vanity—stretched out, feverish and dusty, under an air conditioning duct. We took her to the vet. It turned out that she'd eaten a poisonous root, which had destroyed her liver—she had only a few hours left to live. We carried her back home. There we made her a comfortable bed of towels and old scraps of flannel, and we let her die in peace. ◆

Charlie Vázquez

Excerpt from *Contraband*
(Rebel Satori, 2010)

The sun sank behind the mountains, casting a long shadow over the coast, which slid into the cantina like a stalking cat, caressing all inside with the secrets of twilight. Candle-fire became brighter and people got closer to one another, huddling in nervous clusters of red feathers, unfastened camouflage fatigues, and tattered fashions of the past. Their eyes (and perhaps even mine) flickered more intensely, as dusk gave way to night. A forest of creature eyes.

A compassionate smile painted Alto's face with a wash of papaya flesh—he shone like a deity in fiery semi-darkness. He became to me, in those few tense seconds, a spiritual beacon. I still cannot rationalize those feelings, but that was how it felt at the time. The whole of my body and soul listened to him as if he were a messiah, a man sent from far away to dispel lies and teach universal truths. I tried to convey a neutral impression and became enthralled by his voice.

Alto knew this. "What are you thinking?" he asked, laughing kindly.

"I can't say."

I'd always been told that my face illustrated the feelings in my heart and I could see the desiring colors and hues of my eyes reflecting in his. His eyes wandered away from mine while he spoke, to study my arms and hair and mouth. My fear of all the potential things he could become to me became noise in my head. I realized, in the midst of the war inside of me, that there was a sudden commotion growing around us. It got louder and infused my bones with confusion and worry and the instinct to flee like a wild animal set loose of its cage.

Alto detected my crisis and leaned forward to console me, to whisper something from his lips to mine—just as a storm of hissing bullets and devastating artillery began piercing the battered walls and shattering

the windows around us. We fell to the floor, avoiding hot projectiles and razor-edged glass. I grabbed my suitcase, dragging it behind me.

Alto led the crawl across the imploding room and others followed, hoping he would lead us to freedom. People were choking and screaming. I couldn't stop thinking about those who didn't make it, those who bled on the floor they'd been dancing on just moments before, calling out the names of people who weren't there—the living and the dead they began seeing around them.

We tumbled down a flight of carpeted stairs and rolled down another. I was astonished that we eluded serious injury. I could see nothing, or very little, and followed the sound of Alto and his deep breathing. I panted, heaving the desperate sounds of a frightened animal, as we scurried along the filthy floor to a hatch. I watched as Alto dove into the unknown. He cushioned my landing when I followed him and set me aside to catch the others, who had minor injuries and were drunk and crying. There were six of us. The rest had perished or surrendered. Alto slid the hatch-cover back into place from underneath, locking it. In a crawl space no wider than a meter and about as high, we crawled until Alto located a second access hole, where a ladder took us down to a solid metal door.

Kicking a scorpion aside, he unlocked the door with shaking hands, assuring us, "We're safe now." The others studied Alto and I with weary and panicked eyes, as the six of us stumbled into a humid tunnel that led to the murky labyrinth known as the Santa Prieta Underside. *Where did the light in their eyes go?* Even I shivered at the crossroads between two worlds—wondering what I'd be stepping into, and dreading what I'd left behind. *And would I soon be dreading where I'd arrived and wondering about all I'd left behind?*

The low-ceilinged corridor was lined with dozens of grimy men in various states of contemplation and confusion. Upon reaching a common area of fresh and moist concrete walls, a feeling of safety fell upon me like rain, as excited shadows swarmed us and offered us bottles of water and bandages and soothing fruit. They were as a race of forest creatures: bearded, clawed, hairy—smelling as if they had never once bathed. Despite the jolt of shock I felt upon seeing these Santa Prieta undersiders, I vowed never to return above, after what I'd seen.

It was then that a tunnel brother stepped forward from the small crowd before us and bowed, saying, "*Bienvenidos*." ◆

José Manuel Fajardo

Excerpt from "Waves"

My father always used to say to me: "Don't be scared, the waves are there, that's all there is to it. All you have to do is count them properly. The seventh wave is the dangerous one, don't forget that. That's the one with which the sea can cover you and drag you away. Lots of people have died because of that, because they didn't count them properly."

My father was a harvester of goose barnacles, a man whose only education was what life had taught him. And he had lived through many things. He had fought in the Civil War, although still just a young boy, then he had emigrated, as had many others from the village, including uncle Carlos, who had left for Cuba one day before the war, and who from time to time would send a little letter, always accompanied by a photo. Sometimes it would be of a house surrounded by palm trees, sometimes of a meal, in which case my parents would do their best to recognize the guests. They were relatives of whose existence I was only aware of thanks to these photos and the discussions to which they gave rise among my family, since my parents could never agree who was who. My father, though, did not go to Cuba to work, but to Germany. As for us, we stayed at home, always on the lookout for his letters and the money he would send. But he never got used to city life, nor to that unpronounceable language, and so, after four years, he boarded a merchant ship and returned to Galicia. Fortune had not yet smiled on him. It was then that he began to climb down the cliffs to gather goose barnacles, which he would then sell at a good price to the transporters who delivered fresh seafood to the best restaurants in Madrid.

On the day he took me with him to the cliffs to teach me his trade, he said to me for the first time: "The waves are not your

enemies, quite the opposite, they bring life to these coastlines." He stopped for a moment to prepare the rope he had attached to one of the pine trees growing at the top of the cliff, and added with a knowing wink, "the thing is, sometimes life can be a bitch." Then we went down carefully as far as the reef, each with a bag attached to our belt. While we gathered the goose barnacles, with the crash of the swell breaking at our feet against the rocks then retreating with the hiss of a snake, my father kept repeating, "How many is that now?" I would reply that it was the second or the fourth, and he would ask me again, "And now?" And I would reply "the third" or "the fifth". When the sixth one came, he would tell me: "Quick, let's get up there, now."

We would climb up three or four meters to get out of reach of the seventh wave, which would roar at our backs like an angry, howling dog, splashing us with its salty shower. Then we would go straight back down to carry on with our work, and things would continue this way, hour after hour, day after day. This ritual lasted for years: it was a ceremony we conducted again and again, like actors in the theatre, ever surer of our roles. My father would keep the rhythm with his questions, and I would answer him, hurrying to gather the goose barnacles and keeping an eye on the next wave.

It wasn't the sea that killed my father, even if he came close to it on several occasions, for the swell has a temperamental character, and its mood can change without warning. No, he was killed by one of the lorries that delivered the goose barnacles to Madrid, when its brakes failed at the crossroads in the port. But I still count waves today; it has become a habit. I do it without even realizing it, all the time, whenever I'm by the sea. It relaxes me. That's what I was doing three years ago: I was counting waves in front of the monitoring station, while on duty with the Guardia Civil, and I was gazing in admiration, once again, at the gigantic silhouette of the Teide volcano, while listening to the crystal clear sea of Tenerife as it purred a few meters from me, so different to the dark and furious sea of my native Galicia.

The reconnaissance helicopter had spotted a small boat adrift in the middle of a swell more violent than usually seen at this time of year. The pilot's voice interrupted my calculations to inform me that it appeared to be another dinghy, but he would only be able

to confirm this when the patrol boat had arrived. Once again, I was struck by the superiority of the world of technology in films. From a satellite in space it was possible to read the number plate of a car in the heart of London. These satellites were in orbit above our heads, they were having fun communicating with each other or fighting amongst themselves, spying or visiting outer space.

But we had to content ourselves with plain old helicopters, involved in uneven battles against ferocious sea winds, without even having the use of a plane. In any case, I was sure the pilot was right and it was one of these dinghies in which illegal immigrants leave the coast of Senegal, dicing with death, chasing a dream that, if they're lucky, ends in the main room of this monitoring station. Here, they can use showers and toilets, they get something to eat, then they're told that they've suffered for nothing because they'll be sent back home. It's a thankless task and I've never managed to get used to it. All that week, not a morning had passed without dinghies arriving on the island. It was always the same: they came in waves, as if desperation had put extra wind in their sails. The passengers' faces were always confused and disoriented, as if they had come not from the neighbouring continent, but from distant planets, like astronauts lost in outer space. ◆

Juan Moreno-Velázquez

Excerpt from *Demystifying a Diva: The Truth Behind the Myth of La Lupe*

It was early 1959 and Cuba was experiencing astonishing political turmoil. The news was filled with reports of a war being fought in the Sierra Maestra, where three revolutionary leaders, an Argentine doctor by the name Ernesto "Che" Guevara and two Cubans, Camilo Cienfuegos and an attorney named Fidel Castro, were fighting and defeating the armed forces of Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista. Somehow, back in Havana, nightlife continued more or less unaffected.

La Red (The Net) was a cabaret where tourists and Cubans would carry on, regardless of the fighting that was advancing dangerously close to Havana. It was a picturesque club decorated in a scenic maritime motif. The club had fisherman's nets hanging all around, lending the feeling that one was inside a fishing vessel.

Located on Avenue L and 19th Street in a district known as El Vedado, the club attracted an interesting array of nightlife seekers. Actors, musicians, businessmen, politicians, and even tourists found in La Red an exciting place where everything was possible, as night often carried on way into the next morning.

Although a rather small club, La Red was a very popular cabaret, considered in those days, the mecca of Cuban *cabaretism*. It was where some of the best Cuban entertainers and prominent personalities of the time celebrated night after night. It was a hotspot, a place to be and be seen by all.

On any given evening one would not be surprised to find writers and intellectuals such as Ernest Hemingway, Simone de Beauvoir, Tennessee Williams or artist Pablo Picasso, as well as the many organized crime figures that frequented Cuba in those days, in the audience. In La Red, Lupe Yolí's star rose and almost immediately became the talk around all corners of Havana.

Cuban musicologist Helio Orovio described her act:

"It was there that she began to do her own thing and immediately became a hit, creating a public addicted to her and another that could not stand her, especially during her presentations on television. For a year and eight months she triumphed at La Red and later at Le Mans. La Lupe was a reflection of the times. There was too much passion inside this tantalizing woman with a voice whose registry was above most female singers of her day. A voice with rhythm, dynamism and explosiveness, she had the ability to mix her singing, her songs, and her sense of humor, with her swift and sensual Antillean grace."

Lupe's act quickly became an integral part of Cuban nightlife and word quickly spread all over Havana. Her performances became a liberating force for some Cubans, who felt that their freedom of expression was being curtailed by the uncertainty of the sociopolitical conditions of the time. Watching Lupe's stage antics gave them the opportunity to unwind, scream, and release all the stress that the new revolution was subjecting them to.

On one particular evening, a group of actors that included Carlos Rafart, Antonia Rey and, her husband, director Andrés Castro, went to La Red after finishing work on a theatrical play.

Antonia Rey remembered that evening:

"We finished working that night and decided to go to La Red to unwind. We had heard about Lupe Yolí, and that night she gave an unbelievable performance. We were so impressed by her performance that we spoke to our friend, journalist René Jordán."

The next evening Jordán and Rafael Casalín, an entertainment journalist with *El País*, went to see the show. Once again, Lupe was magnificent. The journalists were so impressed that Casalín wrote a front-page article, "*La Lupe es un caso psicosomático que divide en dos a Cuba*", ("La Lupe is a psychosomatic case that splits Cuba in two") depicting Lupe's extraordinary performance and calling her "La Lupe" for the first time. From that day on Lupe Yolí became La Lupe.

Her designation as "La Lupe" gave the young singer her first taste of royalty. The designation of the feminine "La" (or masculine "El") before a name carries immense weight in the Spanish language and Latino culture. When recognized by La or El before your name, it attests to your uniqueness, it expresses your being one of a kind.

Now she was La Lupe and it did not matter how many Lupes were to come after her. The title of La Lupe made her the only one, the best, forever.

A solid string of packed performances, as well as two successful recordings, *Con el diablo en el cuerpo* (With the Devil Inside, Disco, 1961) and *La Lupe is Back*, (Disco, 1962), made her one of the most popular female performers of her generation, as well as the most controversial, in a group that included luminaries such as Cuban singers Olga Guillot, Elena Burke, Omara Portuondo, and Celia Cruz, as well as the Puerto Rican singer, Myrta Silva, among many others. ◆

Valeria Luiselli

Two Excerpts From *Faces in the Crowd*
(Granta Books, 2012)
Translated from the Spanish by Christina MacSweeney.

I

It all began in another city and another life. That's why I can't write this story the way I would like to—as if I were still there, still just only that other person. I find it difficult to talk about streets and faces as if I saw them every day. I can't find the correct tenses. I was young, had strong, slim legs.

(I would have liked to start the way Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast ends*.)

*

In that city I lived alone in an almost empty apartment. I slept very little. I ate badly, without much variety. I had a simple life, a routine. I worked as a reader and translator in a small publishing house dedicated to rescuing 'foreign gems'. Nobody bought them, though, because in such an insular culture translation is treated with suspicion. But I liked my work and I believe that for a time I did it well. On Thursdays and Fridays, I did research in libraries, but the first part of the week was reserved for the office. It was a pleasant, comfortable place and, what's more, I was allowed to smoke. Every Monday, I arrived early, full of enthusiasm, carrying a paper cup brimming with coffee. I would say good morning to Minni, the secretary, and then to the chief editor, who was the only editor and therefore the chief. His name was White. I would sit down at my desk, roll a cigarette of Virginia tobacco and work late into the night.

*

In this house live two adults, a baby girl and a little boy. We call him the boy now because, although he's older than his sister, he

insists that he's not properly big yet. And he's right. He's older, but he's still small; he's neither the big boy nor the little boy. So he's just the boy.

A few days ago my husband stepped on a dinosaur when he was coming downstairs and there was a cataclysm. Tears, screaming: the dinosaur was shattered beyond repair. Now my T-Rex really has been *extincted*, sobbed the boy. Sometimes we feel like two paranoid Gullivers, permanently walking on tiptoe so as not to wake anyone up, not to step on anything important and fragile.

II

God and people come out in solidarity with victims. Not just any victim, but victims who successfully victimize themselves. My ex-wife, for example. When we got divorced, the *criolla* turned herself into a poet and a victim; the prophetess of divorced poet-victims.

She's just published a small book of deeply embittered prose poems, self-edited and bilingual, with a so-called publishing house owned by her mentor, a French-American poet who runs a writing workshop called SDML (Spiritual Daughters of Mina Loy). I don't think Mina Loy knows about them. My ex-wife has had the discourtesy to invite me to the launch, which is to be celebrated in her own apartment. I know I have to stay in her good books, because if I don't, she'll never let me near the children, so I have the courtesy to go to New York to see her.

A butler opens the door to me. I ask after the children; they're asleep. The apartment smells of a mixture of uptown perfumery, makeup, newly ironed clothes and asparagus. The butler offers me a martini and, of course, a plate of boiled asparagus. My sight might betray me, but I'm still a hound dog when it comes to sniffing out a coven of witches gathered around their bitterness and a plate of expensive appetizers. I hang my jacket up near the door, among handbags and women's coats of every possible size and texture; I accept just the martini and make my way to the salon.

I can't see the women very well, but from the noise and stench they give off there must be over twenty, over thirty of them, sitting in concentric semicircles around my ex-wife and two other speak-

ers—the three witches of *Macbeth*, but more vulgar and angrier with life. Standing facing the room, my balls suddenly shrink. Two peanuts. Perhaps they completely disappear. I stand there behind the last row of seats, as close as possible to the butler, terrified.

My ex-wife is reading in her international Bogotá accent. The poor woman has a very ugly voice—she moans the guttural consonants, elongates the open vowels and squeaks the *i*'s like a badly tuned machine. She reads a poem about the practical utility of husbands. Her mouth always curved slightly downwards when she was reading aloud; also when she was reproaching me for my infinite list of faults. I imagine the bitter grimace, now further emphasized by the furrows and bags of aging skin. From time to time, bursts of hyena-like laughter break out from the invitees. Maybe, when the ceremony is over, they'll undress me, tie my hands and feet, lift my eyelids and fill my eyes with gobs of spit. They'll shit on me—years of intestinal retention.

She finishes reading the poem and the whole room reverberates with an ecstasy of applause. I reach out my hand to see if the butler is still beside me. There he is. I put my arm round his shoulder:

Don't desert me, brother, stay here close by.

I'll be here, sir, I'm not moving.

She reads another poem, and another. When she's finished the final one, presumptuously dedicated to Mina Loy, the women give her a standing ovation. The chairs scrape against the floor.

(Where can she have gotten so many chairs from?) My ex-wife, a spider in the center of her web, looks at me from the opposite corner of the room. I feel her stare. I'm a tiny fly trapped in her sticky universe. The butler removes my arm to attend to the ladies' demands; I stay put, not knowing where to put my free hand; and the one holding the martini is now trembling slightly.

The international Bogotanian starts talking: poetry, the breakdown of identity, life in exile, and who knows how many more *criollo* clichés. She pauses, and to round off says: I'm grateful for the presence of my ex-husband, an unjustly obscure but highly capable poet. The little heads turn in my direction. What does she mean by 'capable'? I get an urgent need to piss. Dozens of painted snouts smile. I can still make out white on black and know they're smiling because the darkened room suddenly lights up like a star-toothy sky.

The olive throbs in my glass. My organs, in my suit, throb. The faces looking at me throb; out there, the city throbs: the persistent pumping of the blood, the temperature of humiliation. Speech! Speech! I wish for an instant death I am unable to bring about. Then I speak:

I came because I was invited.

(Silence.)

I came because I've always been a dedicated feminist. Viva Mina Loy! Viva!

(Silence.)

In fact, María, I came because I wanted to ask you to lend me just a few dollars to take the children to the fair next weekend.

(Silence.) ◆

Awilda Cáez

Tres fragmentos

La princesa

La realidad es que a la cenicienta, el zapato le quedó grande. El príncipe ya la había escogido por su hermosura, así que disimuló ante todos el percance.

Muchos años después, motivada por el desencanto con su matrimonio, la princesa le dijo a su esposo:

—No debiste haberle hecho creer a todos que el zapato era mío. De seguro hubieses sido más feliz con la verdadera dueña.

A lo que el príncipe contestó:

—No te preocupes, querida. Recuerda que eran dos zapatos.

Interrogatorio

La mujer abrió la puerta de la casa y se encontró un sapo.

—Ya sé quién eres —dijo—. Debo hacerte unas preguntas.

El sapo la miró con sus ojos redondos.

—¿Me amarás toda la vida?

—Sí —contestó el animal con voz ronca.

—¿Serás fiel y nunca me engañarás?

—Te juro que sí —respondió el sapo.

—¿Compartirás lo que tienes conmigo?

—Absolutamente todo —dijo.

Luego del beso, el sapo y la sapa abandonaron la casa rumbo a su nuevo hogar en el río.

De lunes a viernes

Raquel camina desde su casa hasta la estación del tren. Hoy tiene que llegar temprano para conseguir un asiento, de lo contrario tendrá que estar de pie los veinte minutos que dura el recorrido. Le agrada sentarse cerca del pasillo para ver cuando él sube, como todos los días, en la estación de Cupey.

La mañana es calurosa y más con las medias de nilón que lleva

puestas bajo el pantalón. Son de las que tienen licra y se ven brillosas cuando les da el sol. Le gusta ponérselas porque aprietan el abdomen. Se ve más delgada. Además, estas son de una edición especial que viene de Colombia y levantan las nalgas.

La gente empuja sin fijarse. Raquel piensa que es irónico que tengan tanta desesperación por llegar al trabajo y luego tanta urgencia de que sean las cinco para largarse. Se escurre impaciente entre el montón de cuerpos que rozan unos con otros sin querer y a veces a propósito.

El hombre del lado mira por la ventana, está nervioso por los tramos elevados. Ella se acomoda en el asiento e inventa una pose de indiferencia, mientras el tren se acerca a la estación que espera. Se abren las puertas frente a un grupo de personas vestidas con chaquetas o uniformes de colores oscuros. Uno que otro estudiante aporta algún zarpazo de color con camisetas modernas que les hacen parecer grafitis en movimiento. Ya no hay asientos vacíos. Saúl entra. Se acomoda unos cuantos pies más adelante, al lado de dos universitarias que no paran de hablar. Raquel simula que las observa; espera a que él se distraiga y, de vez en cuando, se le escapan los ojos. Lo mira. A falta de saberle el nombre y las referencias le llama «el hombre de las manos bonitas».

Ella tiene la mejor ubicación. Desde su asiento puede verlo completo y pensar en todas las ilusiones que le llegan puntuales de lunes a viernes a las siete de la mañana. Mira a su diestra y ve una madre con sus dos hijos. Sueña que es ella, camino a algún colegio a llevar la prole entretanto el hombre de la casa trabaja desde temprano. Le gustaría casarse con un abogado para quitarse la preocupación de tener que contratar uno cuando lo necesite.

Cerca de San Francisco ya se ven las casas de techo a dos aguas. Le agrada el vecindario y la cercanía que tiene al pequeño centro comercial.

Llegan a la estación de Torrimar. Es hora de bajarse. Saúl es de los primeros en irse; esa es la única ventaja de los que se quedan de pie. Le gustaría atreverse a hablarle. Hasta ha pensado empujarlo para que las disculpas sean un tema de conversación. Las pocas ocasiones en que lo ha tenido cerca, se concentra en mirarle las manos.

Suspira en silencio y espera su turno para salir. Luego camina por la acera hacia al norte las dos cuadras que faltan hasta la oficina. Mientras, al otro lado de la calle en dirección al sur, el licenciado Saúl Márquez va enojado porque hoy en el tren, su chica favorita traía puestos pantalones y no le pudo ver las piernas.

Poetry/Poesía

Nancy Mercado

El Coto Laurel

Dinner with mom
And with *tía* Carmín
Consists of a heavy soup
We call *sancocho*
It consists of stories
About the exquisiteness
Of grandmother's cooking
How she stretched a sliver of onion
And little garlic cloves
During the Second World War
Enough to cook a pot
Of beans for two nights
How the taste of those beans
Could never be duplicated

Dinner with mom
And with *tía* Carmín
Consists of a warm sunset
White curtains flowing
In the kitchen
Annoying mosquitoes
Under the table
And highball glasses
Filled with passion juice

Nancy Mercado

The Dead

Where I lay the dream of
following myself in your soul
—Julia De Burgos

I face the universe
When I speak to the dead
I lay as they do
In their coffins
My body upright
Revealed to the wide expanse
Of the firmament

There I speak with mother
In some brightly-lit hallway

She says she is going
To sleep with father
His voice resonating from inside
A black room she enters

I often speak to the dead
They share their days with me
Provide advice
They have no wings
No halos
No emitting light from within
They're people just like you and like me

Orlando Ferrand

Citywalker
(from Citywalker, Publish America, 2010)

I've been looking for water lilies on the pavement
for a diamond's shine in the eyes of city walkers

Oh, village boy
beware of the promise of an endless night
under the bridges

Life is also a blue port
setting the trap for the sailor

And I will walk away
And I will raise umbrellas against the rainstorm

And I will ask the strangers
not for the loss
but for the return of my rainbow

Where is my rainbow?
Are there rainbows in New York after the storm?

Urayoán Noel

Uptown Villanelle
(previously unpublished)

With time to spare and city skin to scar
and one more concrete chorus to rehearse,
they stumble sleepy off the subway car.

Red eyes. Remnants of snow. A shuttered bar.
The Bronx. A yawning woman holds her purse
with time to spare and city skin to scar.

The food trucks sell bittersweet bliss. It's far
to midtown. Let commuters twitch and curse.
Up here they stumble off the subway car.

The air is thick. The river is an avatar
of home. A broken memory gets worse
with time to spare and city skin to scar.

I start to write: "We don't know where we are.
We'll pay a fare too steep to reimburse."
I too will stumble off the subway car.

Their bodies slumped, their songs dissimilar,
bookended by the rust, the smell of tar,
they dream another city, then disperse,
with time to spare and city skin to scar.

Urayoán Noel
(from Hi-Density Politics, BlazeVOX, 2010)

co-opt city

hi then, city
cooped, recouped
hi-density
hidden
sí, tú
quién?
in situ
our birthright
no
dead end
yet
& then
andén
domainofhope
atdoubtdotnet
a burned
cd
a Citi-®
scan
some ziti
strained
somos sums
cu dada nos
de servers
eros
do shared
sensoria
da citizens

be vocal
dem denizens
transLorcal
say when
ye urb
of quién?

(op. city)

Charlie Vázquez
(from Meditations/Meditaciones: Bronx/Salsa, Fireking, 2012*)*

Bronck's River

The eternal flow of your dry leaf whispers
a survivor in your own rippling skin
a sliding ribbon akin to dark fleshy hips
writhing to watery rhythms magnificent

Oh, river of emptiness,
oh, river of desperation
pride of fallen chiefs
manic like a thief
you even whisper like a villain
—a dagger unsheathed!

(What remains strewn about—
lies discarded for truths
like the rocks that grunt
under your crushing weight)

(Lone water bird,
are you lost in that starkness?
You'll perish in the darkness
of an overgrown night!)

High and low your killing tides groan
and whisper autumn secrets
felled by hunting trail ambush
where man once tracked beast
where man once tracked man
where man now shames you

slanders your wisdom
poisons your water ritual

(But you take your frantic, drowning collateral—
don't you, sacred River of High Bluffs?)

Your bats spy from above
your rats seethe from below
your bleeding drums beat breezes
their blood seeps from these rocks
your ambushed Siwanoy screams
are hollowed by all four winds

You are what creatures feast on
honey Oshún prayers please you
even if for mere moments
you're a silence unleashing sirens
a bleeding vengeance unforgotten
an immortal curse thrown for all eternity—
a most unusual beauty!

How much honey rests on your floor?

Lila Zemborain

Fragmento de *El rumor de los bordes*
(Sevilla: Biblioteca Sibila – Fundación BBVA, 2011)

La escritura en sí es una línea que se tuerce y se retuerce, una línea imposible de medir, como la COSTA *inglesa de Mandelbrot que verifica su inmensidad cuando se la calcula con medios cada vez más ínfimos.*

Y es entonces otra vez Borges y Zenón de Elea y los silogismos

improbables de entender

o la Biblioteca de Babel y los aborrecidos estantes de libros

alineados caóticamente con INNUMERABLES *letras y páginas a veces en blanco para representar la proliferación o la vastedad de lo que es imperceptible.*

Así, el pescado que comí anoche resuena en las dendritas invocando al tiburón que se pasea por tu mente cuando te alejas de la COSTA y ya las piedras no son la cercanía; la determinación de la distancia se altera irremediablemente con la imprecisa irritación del agua viva que te roza con sus filamentos de plata exasperando la fijeza.

Entonces el ritmo se instala en las palabras, así como la respiración intenta digitar un orden, reverberaciones del sonido para apaciguar lo inestable. Y otra creencia se presenta en la necesidad de aquietamiento de la sincrónica susceptibilidad de lo viviente, puntual desequilibrio en la piedra movediza de Tandil, aguas desbordadas, el viento patagónico que acecha, mientras la costa se hace tuya en la arena que adoramos, y ráfagas y relámpagos en los cielos y fracturas, fragmentos, FRACCIONES, *fractales, fragilidad, fragancia, fraterno, y Gertrude Stein en la repetición de un cubismo inconcebible.*

Toda acción es una reacción, dice Santo Tomás, y viceversa; si se respira es porque hay aire, si se tiene sed es porque hay agua, si hablo es porque alguien puede escucharme, si tengo miedo es porque la naturaleza humana tiene la capacidad del odio; pero entonces, ¿por qué esta generalización provoca la sospecha de perderse en el sentido de lo último, de lo mínimo, en la disolución sin alegría? *Buscar esa* FRACCION *que haga romper este ciclo de evidencias, esa gama de exclamaciones internas que hacen que uno quiera inmediatamente levantarse.*

Catalizar sería ahora levantarse, agarrar el diccionario de la A la J de María Moliner, buscar entre las LETRAS la c, abrir el libraco y hojear hasta llegar a ca, cat, cata: prefijo de origen griego que significa "abajo" o "hacia abajo", cataplasma, cataclismo, catacresis, catacumba, catalepsis, catalejo, catálisis, catarro, catástrofe.

Pero a veces hay deseos apremiados a cerrar el desaliento, sin aire, la desazón, sin sal, el desconcierto, sin concierto, una suerte de optimismo forzado. Yo quisiera que hoy nadie viniera, quedarme todo el día en camisón, sin bañarme, sin salir, sin tener la necesidad de hablar, sólo pensar en todo esto, seguir pensando, desazonada, porque al desazonar algo se desconcierta.

Ángel Antonio Ruiz Laboy

frontera

un pez dormita su aleta entre mis piernas
está harto de las semillas que producen sombra
y ha venido hacia el naufragio de mis manos
hacia la concha de estas palomas moribundas

le he tejido la luz en las escamas
lo he soplado a la frontera de la rosa.

pasaporte a la ceniza

a Manuel

me voy del pan, del mar, del aguacero
huyo de comer las uvas negras a la orilla de las tardes
huyo de ver las llagas florecer como rosas de agua fúnebre
de entregar en cada polvo un pasaporte de ceniza
gotereando la fe que puse en cada primavera transeúnte de la piel

voy camino a ser un emigrante de la sal de los rosarios
dejo atrás la huella de humedal que nadie habitó sino el deseo
sino quimeras que amenazan con romper el sueño
y con abrir las bisagras de ese confín alado de tu pecho
vuelo de ti y de tu nombre, de tu saliva y de tu axila
de esta hambre de lloverme labio en tus heridas
de estas ganas de curarte lo que hiero con mi historia
historia que es mía y que fue tuya y ahora es de nadie
salvo de un albatros crucificado entre poemas

y es que a veces no me basta decantar la sed de tanta compañía
ni hacer un homenaje a cada antojo de un altar que se apolille
frente al fuego

si mi oración se pudre arrodillada en el desasosiego
si me vuelvo polizón en el cordel de los milagros esperando a uno
uno que me devuelva algo de la vida que entregué e irme con ella
a cabalgar lejos de toda profecía de salvación o muerte

irme sin bandera ni boleto de regreso
hasta hallar un balcón de esos que tienen mecedora
y columpiar en la tarde la memoria y los olvidos
hacerme mapas en la piel, lloverme a gritos la renuncia
y poblar de estrellas mi propia noche a oscuras de nombrarte

de vez en cuando
tendré que dibujar un astrolabio que convulse las distancias
detenerme en la estación de cada verbo y deambular
por la torpeza del deseo que te memoria
sobre esa huella dactilar que es un pasaje de vuelta inadvertido

se me hace imperativo irme de ti, darme todo al viaje sin regreso
y huir nuevamente del pan y huir del mar, del aguacero
de los nombres, las ausencias, las promesas
y aunque no sepa de qué huyo, si es de ti o del miedo de quererte
si es de mí o del miedo de dolerme y de dolerte
huyo del agüero sentencioso, de la pena del silencio
huyo de la posibilidad de ver espaldas
porque eso son las despedidas, un desfile de espaldas que se alejan

Biographies/Biografias

Rosa Beltrán – (Mexico)

Rosa Beltrán is the author of the novels *La corte de los ilusos, El paraíso que fuimos, Alta infidelidad and Efectos secundarios*. Other works include the short fiction collections *Optimistas, Amores que matan,* Joaquín Mortiz and the books of essays *Mantis: sentido y verdad en la cultura literaria posmoderna and América sin americanismos.* Some of her works have been translated into English, Italian, French, Dutch and Slovenian and her stories have appeared in anthologies published in many different countries.

In 1994 she was recognized by the American Association of University Women for her essays on writers in the 20th Century. In 1988 she won the National University Prize for Young Academics in the area of creation and in 2011 the Reconocimiento Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz through la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). She's been considered "an original voice whose stabbing irony and sharp stare insist on tradition in order to subvert it."

Awilda Cáez – (Puerto Rico)

Awilda Cáez is the author of the story collection *Adiós Mariana y otras despedidas,* winner of the Primer Premio en el Certamen Interuniversitario de Literatura, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, in April of 2009. Later, she was chosen by the newspaper *El Nuevo Día* as one of the ten best writers in 2010. Cáez has also been awarded various other literary prizes in Puerto Rico. She was chosen by the magazine CARAS, in January 2011, as one of the seven distinguished people in the arts, in an article titled "Boricas en la mira".

Awilda has worked as a cultural journalist for the radio and the press. She was cofounder of Editorial Pasadizo, and over the course of five years held the position of editor-in-chief. She designs and conducts workshops for fiction and is a consultant for the editing, correction and publication of books. Awilda is a literary agent representing Puerto Rico and the Caribbean for the Vilar Creative Agency in Colorado, and her second book, *Manchas de tinta en los dedos,* will be published in 2012. She's currently working on her first novel.

Álvaro Enrigue – (Mexico)

Álvaro Enrigue was born in Mexico in 1969. He has a master's degree in Latin American Literature from the University of Maryland. He is currently working on his Ph.D., while also teaching translation and creative writing at the same time. In addition, Enrigue has worked as part-time professor at the Ibero-American University in Mexico City, and he has acted as editor for various cultural journals.

Enrigue has worked as a literary critic, writing for magazines both in Mexico and in Spain, such as *Letras Libres, Vuelta, Lateral and Insula*. His first novel, *La muerte de un instalador,* won the Joaquín Mortiz Award for a first novel in 1996. Enrigue has also published a collection of short stories: *Virtudes capitales* and the novel *El cementerio de sillas* which was selected in 2003 as the best novel by the Mexican literary magazine *Tempestad*. Álvaro Enrigue currently lives in Washington, D.C.

José Manuel Fajardo – (Spain)

José Manuel Fajardo was born in Granada, Spain, and raised in "an ugly and boring section of Madrid". He studied at the Facultad de Derecho de la Universidad de Madrid, participating actively in the student movement against Franco. His first position as a journalist was in the cultural pages of *Mundo Obrero*, the official newspaper of the Spanish Communist Party, of which he would later leave, without abandoning his leftist principles. He has also written for many other publications and newspapers in Spain, France, Mexico and Latin America.

He published his first book of historical non-fiction in 1990, *La epopeya de los locos,* which he revised in 2002. In 1996 he published his first novel *Carta del fin del mundo*, following by *El Converso,* his most widely known work that has been published in several editions. After living in the Basque country for many years he published *Una belleza convulsa,* set in the contemporary Basque region and narrated by a "zulo" who recounts his troubled life and the ETA's terrorism.

Orlando Ferrand – (Cuba)

Orlando Ferrand was born in Cuba in 1967 and emigrated to the United States in 1992. He is the award-winning author of *La otra isla* and *Citywalker,* two collections of poetry. He is a graduate of the American Language Program at Columbia University, where he met his mentor, the professor and writer Robert F. Cohen. Ferrand has also studied creative writing, comparative literature and English Literature at City College of the City University of New York.

He's been an Artist-In-Residence at Princeton University, Pratt Institute, and has also been enrolled, since 2006, at the School of Professional Studies at Parsons' the New School of Design, and Pratt Institute in New York City. He has an Advanced Certificate in Decorative Arts and spent many years studying Theater Arts in Cuba before leaving. He lives in New York City.

Valeria Luiselli – (México)

Her novels and essays have been widely translated and her work has been published in magazines and newspapers including the *New York Times, Review, Granta*, and *Internazionale*. She has collaborated with artists in numerous multidisciplinary projects; among those, a ballet libretto for the British choreographer Christopher Wheeldon which was performed by the New York City Ballet at Lincoln Center. She teaches Creative Writing at the Universidad del Claustro de Sor Juana and is studying for a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature at Columbia University. Her first novel, *Faces in the Crowd*, and an English translation of her essays, *Sidewalks*, are forthcoming from Granta.

Nancy Mercado – (USA)

Nancy Mercado recently served as Guest Editor for Phati'tude Literary Magazine's issue *¿What's in a Nombre? Writing Latin@ Identity in America*. Featured in The Encyclopedia of Hispanic American Literature (Facts on File) and inducted into The Museum of American Poetics, Mercado is also profiled in *Latino Leaders Magazine*, as "one of the most celebrated members of the Puerto Rican literary movement in the Big Apple". She is the author of *It Concerns the Madness* (Long Shot Productions) and editor of *If the World were Mine; A Chil-*

dren's Anthology published by the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC).

Mercado has toured throughout the United States, Europe and Canada as a featured poet and conference panelist and has been published in numerous literary magazines. The author and director of seven stage plays, Mercado's theatre work has been produced throughout the United States and Puerto Rico; one of these works was co-authored with renowned Nuyorican writer Pedro Pietri. She has also served as a panelist for the New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA) and the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) and lives in New York City.

Luis Negrón – (Puerto Rico)

Luis Negrón is a bookseller and writer. He published and co-edited *Los otros cuerpos: Antología de la literatura gay, lésbica y queer desde Puerto Rico y su diáspora* with Moisés Agosto and David Caleb Acevedo. He was also included in *En el ojo del huracán: Nueva antología de narradores puertorriqueños* published by Editorial Norma. His book of short stories *Mundo cruel* is on its third edition in Puerto Rico. Seven Stories Press will be publishing an English edition translated by Suzanne Jill Levine in 2013.

Mundo cruel won Honorable Mention in the short story category by the PEN Club of Puerto Rico in 2010 and was nominated as one of the ten best books of the years by *El Nuevo Día*, one of the island's premier newspapers. Luis is the curator (along with Richard Vargas) of CineMAC, a cinema program at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico. In May 2012 he completed *Mundo cruel: el play*, a theatrical adaptation of his book, as overseen by Jacqueline Duprey in the Sala-Teatro Beckett. He lives in Santurce, Puerto Rico.

Urayoán Noel – (Puerto Rico)

Urayoán Noel is a poet, performer, scholar, and translator and is currently Assistant Professor of English at the University at Albany, SUNY. His works include the books of poetry *Hi-Density Politics, Boringkén, and Kool Logic/La lógica kool*, the performance DVD *Kool Logic Sessions*, and as translator, the chapbook ILUSOS by Edwin Torres.

He is currently a fellow at Bronx Council on the Arts as well as a Ford Foundation postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College, where he's completing a book-length study of Nuyorican poetry and its performance from the 1960s to the present.

A contributing editor of *Mandorla*, Noel's creative and critical writings have appeared in *Latino Studies, Contemporary Literature, Centro, Fence, BOMB, New York Quarterly, and Diasporic Avant-Gardes*, and he is featured in such anthologies as *Malditos latinos, malditos sudacas. Poesía hispanoamericana made in USA* and *The Wind Shifts: New Latino Poetry*. Originally from San Juan, Puerto Rico, he lives in the Bronx.

Ángel Antonio Ruiz Laboy - (Puerto Rico)

Ángel Antonio Ruiz Laboy is a writer, poet, photographer, artist and cultural producer. He graduated from the University of Puerto Rico with a degree in Comparative Literature and founded Homoerótica in 2009, a group that galvanizes LGBT voices and their allies on the island and serves as a platform for other artistic expression and cultural activism.

In 2007 he was chosen to participate in the publication of *Los otros cuerpos: Antología de temática gay, lésbica y queer desde Puerto Rico y su diáspora*. In 2008 he was published in *Los Rostros de la Hidra*, and in 2009 *Anzuelos y Carnadas*, a poetry collaboration with Xavier Valcárcel. Most recently, he published *El tiempo de los escarabajos* with Erizo Editorial in 2011. He lives in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Mayra Santos Febres – (Puerto Rico)

Mayra Santos-Febres is a Puerto Rican author, poet, novelist, professor of literature, and literary critic who has garnered fame at home and abroad. In 1991, Santos-Febres garnered critical acclaim for her first two collections of poetry, *Anamu y manigua and El orden escapado*. In 1996, she won the Juan Rulfo Award for her short story, *Oso blanco*, which was published in her collection of short stories called *Pez de Vidrio. Pez de Vidrio* (published in English as *Urban Oracles*) contains 15 short stories about the complicated relationships between sexual desire, race, identity, social status, and political status in modern Caribbean society.

Her first novel *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* (published in English as *Sirena Selena*) describes the life of a teenaged homosexual male drag

queen who works in the streets and has a talent for singing boleros. Santos-Febres completed her undergraduate work at the University of Puerto Rico and holds an M.A. and Ph.D. from Cornell University. Her more recent publications include a collection of essays called *Sobre piel y papel* and also a novel about Isabel la Negra titled *Nuestra Señora de la Noche (Our Lady of the Night)*. She is the Executive Director of Festival de la Palabra and lives in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Julio Ricardo Varela – (Puerto Rico/USA)

Julio Ricardo Varela is a writer and new media journalist and graduate of Harvard, with over twenty years of experience in educational publishing (former VP of Reading and ELL/Bilingual for Houghton Mifflin Harcourt), journalism (former reporter for *The Boston Globe*), and social media marketing. One of the country's leading thought leaders on Latino social media, he recently appeared on CBS' "Face the Nation" to discuss the Latino vote in the 2012 election and has also been featured on CNN in America.

Julio founded a bilingual new media company called "Latino Rebels," where he works with twenty of the country's Latino social media influencers, journalists and writers to produce content and deliver targeted campaigns for companies. His personal blog has generated major interest for its insights on Puerto Rican politics and his novel *Franky Benítez* will be published in 2012. A native of San Juan, Puerto Rico and a former resident of the Bronx, Varela now calls Boston home.

Charlie Vázquez – (USA)

Charlie Vázquez is a writer and editor of Puerto Rican and Cuban descent. His second novel, *Contraband*, was published in 2010 by Rebel Satori Press. He has edited two anthologies of contemporary Latino literature: *The Best of PANIC!*, which was based on his underground East Village reading series, and he served as co-editor with Charles Rice-González on the genre-reinventing *From Macho to Mariposa: New Gay Latino Fiction* in 2011.

Charlie also penned the bilingual poetry collection *Meditations/Meditaciones: Bronx/Salsa* in 2011 and is the New York City coordinator for Puerto Rico's "Festival de la Palabra". He was born and raised in the Puerto Rican barrios of the Bronx and now lives in Brooklyn.

Juan Moreno-Velázquez – (Puerto Rico)

Juan A. Moreno-Velázquez is an award-winning journalist specializing in entertainment and the Latino community. An authority in the field, Moreno-Velázquez has participated on television, doing Grammy commentary for FOX, as well as NY 1, and on innumerable radio shows, where he has discussed different issues in the music business and their effect on Latinos. He was the Entertainment Editor at *El Diario-Laprensa,* the largest and oldest Spanish-language daily in New York City.

He is the author of *Demystifying a Diva: The Truth Behind the Myth of La Lupe* and also of *La Reina es la Rumba*, which depicts the life of Celia Cruz. His third book, *MAELO...Hijo de Boriken, Rey de los Soneros*, which depicts the life of Ismael Rivera, was released in Puerto Rico on May 13, 2010, and his next book is based on the life of famous bandleader and FANIA salsero Johnny Pacheco, to be followed by a history of the FANIA record label.

Lila Zemborain – (Argentina)

Lila Zemborain is an Argentine poet and critic who has lived in New York City since 1985. She is the author of the poetry collections *Ábrete sésamo debajo del agua, Usted, Guardianes del secreto, Malvas orquídeas del mar, Rasgado*, and the chapbooks *Ardores and Pampa*. Her work has been included in the anthologies *Mujeres mirando al sur, Poetas sudamericanas en USA*, and *Final de entrega. Antologíade poetás contra la violencia de género.*

Her poems, translated by Rosa Alcalá and Mónica de la Torre, have also appeared in several English-language anthologies, including *The Light of the City and Sea. An Anthology of Suffolk County Poetry and Corresponding Voices*; in the art catalogues *Alessandro Twombly* and *Heidi McFall*; and in publications such as *Ecopoetics, Rattapallas, The Brooklyn Rail, A Gathering of the Tribes, The Poetry Project Newsletter*, and *Mandorla*. Lila Zemborain is the curator of the KJCC Poetry Series at New York University and Clinical Assistant Professor in the M.F.A. in Creative Writing in Spanish of NYU.

Produced by the Lehman College Office of Media Relations & Publications