



My Dress Just Hangs There

Rolando J. Romero

To Blanca, whose tale of lost wealth during the Cuban Revolution marked our very personal class struggle.

As I see you standing in the doorway, I wonder about the symbolism of the word threshold. In Spanish the word “desquiciado” (out of frame) refers to somebody who is mad. But whenever I think of you, I think of you standing in the doorway, facing outwards, looking out. Do you know that I am looking? Is the pose meant for me to look, to attract my vision towards you as you decide to be framed by the door, by the inside (the home, the community, paradise) and the outside (the world, expulsion, knowledge)? If this were a short story I would understand the implications; continuity, revelation, epiphany. After all, the threshold merges two worlds in one point. I also wonder why I think of you within the frame, since the frame provides the lens through which I am allowed to look outside. But your standing in the door determines my vision. Is this your way of talking to me? Am I being sexist? (“me gustas cuando callas” “poesía eres tú,” “que el tiempo ah, te hiciera estatua.”) Will Rosario Castellanos be standing in the background, ready to jump at me the way Pancho Villa pops up in Sabina Berman?

There may be other reasons. A Lacanian reading points to the fact that the frame signals a word, “quicio”(frame), sanity. Language alludes by metaphor, plays with me in scores of beyond-the-surface signification. In this case the word serves as a warning, even if it unsettles me. Is it a romantic calling for me to step outside, to forget rules, order, function, and to just let go (after all the *carpe diem* instructs with a double message)?

Este que vez, engaño colorido
Que del arte ostentando los primores
Con falsos silogismos de colores
Es cauteloso engaño del sentido

But even here, I could listen to the *carpe diem* in Góngora’s version:





Goza cuello, cabello, labio y frente,
Antes que lo que fue en tu edad dorada
Oro, lilio, clavel, cristal luciente,
no sólo en plata o viola troncada
se vuelva, mas tú y ello juntamente
en tierra, en humo, en polvo, en sombra, en nada.

What does it mean that I closed the frame where I remember you the most? Was it fear, again, or practicality? People say that still waters run deep, and even the Spanish-language version “cuando el río suena...” combine to form a strange allusion. Deep waters that announce the tidal onslaught. An unleashed force of nature set on its path of destruction. So does the destruction signal my resolve or the consequences? You see how nothing is clear?

A couple of days ago I discovered who you really were. Even though I know you extremely well, your actions made me realize that you direct your recklessness a lot more than you make people believe. “No hay borracho que coma lumbre,” as the saying goes. You exposed another layer of yourself, or rather; you let me know that there was more to you than I wanted to believe. And even this incident glows in its ambivalence because as much as it signaled your recklessness, it also signaled your individuality. Butterfly, wings, morning, dew.

I realize that your resolve belongs less to you than to me; my projections onto your image are only patriarchal longings for control. A silent woman cannot be the source of knowledge any more than any other inanimate object can. I realize that this image of you makes you passive, or rather, aggressive only to the extent that your free will attracts the gaze. Could I really talk to you freely? Could I really explore what it is that you are thinking, how you put things together? I wonder to what extent under other circumstances things may have been allowed to develop.

Lately I have been feeling that I am on a leash, that I can neither talk about my feelings nor am I allowed to fantasize, to imagine you in your glorious colors, dedication, affirmation, wit, intelligence. Can two people be connected in spite of the everyday? Are there lines of communication that no one else can see?

I have been away from the oracle, and missing it, came back. I not only missed the possibilities, but the fight to get there. I knew I could find the oracle in the blank spaces of a page, or maybe qua pilgrimage, the reward is manifested in the very struggle to arrive. And then upon arrival complete peace, solitude, communion. Is the oracle myself? How else can the oracle manage to sneak up on me? At night, in flashing moments, between sentences, in conversations, on the road, in my dreams, in my fantasies? How can it be everywhere? I can see it in a smile, in a turn of phrase, in a question. How can it speak with silence? But it does. Do stars know which hearts their light caresses? Mutual needs, as the mirror craves the reflections lest it only reflect voids, but no, it can see the naked soul standing in front of it. It crisply reflects the blemishes on its glorious shining surfaces, though its thirst augments the blindness of the soul it seeks. I stand before the mirror and find only myself; the mirror stands in front of me and sees only my reflection. The priest



who prays to moonlight, to shadows, to unsung songs, to dances with no dancers, to music on a page, to ineffable poetry, to lips that never touch, stands before the oracle and wants to know: Are you the source of knowledge? Can you point the way to me? Can you show me how to get there? Can a road be laid with tears? Can your nature control fires? Would your soul commune with me?

Can you digitize a rose?
 Can you read a rose in Braille?
 Can you smell it with your fingers?
 Can you spell it out longhand?
 Can you trace its hues and colors?
 Can its velvet sear a soul?
 Did its folds cover the e-pistil?
 Or expose it even more?
 Can I climb this glorious mountain?
 Have its crown
 Read my lips, my tongue, my eyes?

How can you write a story with questions? But you can; no beginning, no end, only walking (caminante no hay camino), through the pages. Leafs, paper cuts, nights, songs, Broadway, lights, cigarettes, tears, exposed souls, suicides, broken lines, solitude, emptiness, void. Rings, flights, passing words. You. Elevators, escalators, fear, cold floors, nakedness. You. Broken words, empty receptacles, cut wires, long nights. You. Laughter, desire, you. Music, you. Dancing, you. Wine, you. Taste buds, you. Peace, you. You, yo, U, turns, broken dreams, expectations, Peace, you, me, me and you. You and me. Me and me, you and you. Me and me, me and the night, me and the noise, me and life, trivial, mundane, material. Me and the cold, me and the noise, me and the shivering, me and the noise. Doorbells, timers, meetings, alarms, calendars, supermarkets. Me and the snow, me and the music, me and the keyboard, me and long trips, me and the tangos, me and Almodóvar. Me and the void, me mi...micking, mi...sinterpreting, mi...staken, mi...strusting, mi...sconceived, mi...Me.

What does a camera lens tell you? What do you see through it? Can you see the beacon of the soul? Do eyes talk through this window? They can, you know, they flash sometimes. Register their presence, acknowledge a bond. The camera lens holds the city of Chicago, Amsterdam, Cuernavaca, the pyramids at Teotihuacan, all of Mexico. It can hold you on top of the world, before churches, pieces of rock mixed with memories, it can hold auditoriums, it can hold celebrations, it can hold an airplane. It could hold a sleepless night, a tear, taste of sushi picked up with long fingers. It could hold the "mmmmm" of the night. It could hold poetry, labor, a book, short hair, your voice. It cannot hold me, the lens. Within range but out of sight, encompassing the world, but just outside it, looking but not acknowledging, it can hold the framing but not the frames. It can hold the silence,





it can imprison a gaze, it cannot hold jealousy, ire, regret, but it can hold desire, a virtual caress, it can hold children's innocence.

A lens is like a bellybutton that can hold the universe. It holds a war between two countries, it holds genealogies, it holds the gaze, it holds possibilities, it holds the north and the south, the fork on the road, the past and the choices of the future, it holds languor, it holds a smile, it holds understanding, it holds a shot of tequila, the taste of sweat, the start of desire. Me. It holds my thoughts voiced by a stranger. It holds your gaze, your own desire. It holds me in you. It holds the accidental brushing of a knuckle on a thigh, it holds a shared cigarette, second-hand smoke. It holds the languid stroking of a leg, proxy lips that touch, a bottle of water, the metal taste of a fork, the trace of you. It holds a shivering, a long bath in the tub, trembling hands, crumbling papers, looks of longing. It holds the "once upon a time," Snow White and the Seven Vices, Cinderella and her virginity, intimacies of clothing, exposed skin. It holds all the missed possibilities, the taste of the ocean, the summer breeze. It holds the long walks, the parks and the cities, the climbing of stairs, the tears. It holds the restraints, the words that were never spoken, the tongues that never touched, the waking up together that never was, the hands that never intertwined, the hair that was never stroked, the tears that caring hands never wiped, the regrets. It holds the lost cities, abandoned parks, bottles of liquor, glasses of wine, long flights, looks out the window, poetry. It holds the oracle.

It holds you away from me ("How do I miss you? Let me count the ways.") Taste of sushi, glass of merlot, shot of tequila, salmon on a cracker, bleu cheese, ocean on a pizza (salt, seawater, breeze), "que a tu lado..." long walks through parks, plazas, looks on a child, swims, Sor Juana, heterosexual gender bending, cooking, long talks, hypotheticals, fragmentation, sound of chalk, words on a page, body language, garlic, wine glasses, exposed toes, belly button, laughter, gin, (do I dare?), jalapeños, Chicago.

Shh. Listen. A whisper in the ocean, the beating of my heart.

it holds the naked arms, belly, rose before the mirror
it holds my reflected eyes wishing they were yours
it holds the absence in a written word
the presence of your hand grasping pages
the distance implicit in seeing you whole
it never holds just your eyes your neck shoulder chest
always your whole image
distant
from brown shoes to silver frames before your eyes
across the room
across the table
the floor
the armrest
the gearshift
you over there
How could I ever see pieces of you from so far away?





*I can only see all of you
Only in the words before my eyes
do I see you in fragments
like a close up
a love scene
with the lights on*

I had this daydream last night, of turquoise, of turquoise upon black. A cave, the night, abandon. Did I ever tell you that I often fantasized that I would learn to make love to you as a woman? That I would discover your body, place it as a mirror before you, and that I would see my own desire reflected in your eyes? That I would understand you as a woman, touch you as a woman, and that you would teach me to leave patriarchal habits behind? That you would put a blindfold over my eyes so that I could learn to feel my own skin, that I would learn to smell the roses, that I would remember the taste of you, that I would be able to hear the whisper of your desire on my ears? That we could part our lips and allow ourselves to explore each other? That we could trace the taste of our bodies with our tongues. That you could teach me the simplicity of the woman's sexuality, the free form of silk on the body? The easiness of the body after a shower? That you could teach me how to put cream on my legs. Teach me how to drape my body upon you on an embrace. That we could lie naked on the bed, and have tea on dainty porcelain cups full of flowers. That we would have a pool outside the balcony and we could just dive in. That you would teach me how to play teatime at the bottom of the pool. That I could go shopping with you and be confident that when I told you which clothes fit you best I would not be looking for my own visual satisfaction but your own comfort. That we could get drunk together and we would defy the male stares. That we could play dress-up and masquerade as characters from *The Well of Loneliness* at Halloween parties. That we could read Sor Juana's poetry in bed together, share oranges. (¿Quién me compra una naranja para mi consolación? Una naranja madura en forma de corazón). That we would turn the bedroom into a locutorio and pretend that there were barriers between us, and that we could only let our fingertips touch across the bars, that I would call you Laura, marquesa, and that I would give you a poem about a rose,

Rosa divina que en gentil cultura
eres, con tu fragante sutileza,
magisterio purpúreo en la belleza,
enseñanza nevada a la hermosura.

Amago de la humana arquitectura,
ejemplo de la vana gentileza,
en cuyo ser unió naturaleza
la cuna alegre y triste sepultura.





and we would discuss the carpe diem, and decide whether we would teach a morality lesson with the poem, or how to end it. That I would look for the best rose poem by Sor Juana, and I would write it on your body with invisible indelible ink, and that I would autograph it. That I would use all the different styles of her signature, and would choose the one that made you tickle the most, and from then on that would be my own signature. That I would just learn to hang out with you, and that I would experience desire, not in the male bursts and explosions, but as a symphony, building up to a crescendo, until my body would wriggle and arch under your touch. That you would know how to touch me because you would be touching yourself, that you would make it a game to find the idiosyncrasies of my body and how it differed from yours. Did I ever tell you? I would like to watch:

a rose
 a smile
 a touch
 a memory
 a song
 a symphony
 an ocean
 a sunset
 You

The mountains holding the ocean
 The moon holding the night
 The poem holding the paper
 The sea flowing into the river
 You
 disrobing
 dancing
 posing
 crossing your legs
 diving into a pool
 stabbing paper
 tanning

Why have you unleashed the hunger in my vision? (I saw your belly button today as you exposed the skin of your midriff when you put on your sweater.) This time I was not afraid to watch you, I felt that I did not turn away. Is it gendered, you know I like to watch you, and because I like to watch you, you like to be watched by me? But I know that this exhibitionism is yours alone, I simply give you a venue in which to express it, this is the sadist and the masochist getting together.

Yesterday in the museum, I realized how thirsty my eyes were. Human forms moving among the museum pieces, bodies draped in black, holding up walls and dreaming





of doorways. Proleptic in their fusing a present and future desire, collapsing time, seeking refuge. Water under the bridge, the sounds of spring, black and red tagged to a wall. All among my incredible, unquenchable thirst. The sight of you.

“Are your hands thirsty too? Your lips? Your skin?”

Yes. Do you remember the dress at the museum? I remember I wanted to pick up the edge, look at the seam, analyze the stitching. I wanted so much to turn it inside out, see how it was lined on the inside, find out why its draping did not show any lines. I wanted to touch the fabric with my fingertips, iron it with the palm of my hands, go over its contours. I wanted to imagine that I could close my eyes and attempt to discover its true colors with my touch, I imagined that I would be able to feel the texture of the color, black as silk, turquoise as humidity and moisture, violet as the humming of a bee, white as the snoring of a child, sky blue as the night, red as exposed toes, blue as a vine tattoo, brown as the smell of the earth before a rainstorm, dark hues as *huele de noche*, light green as the chatter of the pebbles on a stream, green as the *Romancero Gitano* discarded in a forest, pink as the texture in a Tamayo painting, purple as a dive in the pool. I imagined I could invent a whole new world that would not be circumscribed by our own predeterminations. I would be able to lie down on a cloud, will my body to fly, ride the surf in the ocean, tear the ropes, break the mast and drift with the sirens’ song, live among the Cyclops and warn them about Odysseus, be the alien in a Nostromo ship. Play Peter Pan, I would fall asleep in the tree house and be woken up by the humming of you as Tinker Bell. We would play “The House at Pooh Corner” all day, and use the lyrics as a checklist of things to do for the day when we were really bored. I would be Saint Sebastian, shirtless, chest exposed, pinned down with a wreath to the trellis with butterflies fluttering about me. I would feel your eyes darting towards the side of my chest, piercing my ribs.

*I saw your soul today
I saw the scalding fires that sustain it.
I felt the thunderbolts
That Gaea’s children
Hid deep inside your eyes
Aimed at me,
Piercing, borrowing, penetrating...*

I dreamt that you would be Saint Sebastian’s stigmatic, feeling the same pain, reflecting the same wounds upon your body. Oh, yes, the dress, the Buddha. As I whispered “You know that I went blind that day from looking at you, but does it really matter that I lost my eyesight, if the pleasures of the soul blind people can also see?” Or did I say

*Aunque cegué de mirarte
¿Qué importa cegar o ver
si gozos que son del alma
también un ciego los ve?*





How would I quench the thirst of my fingers? By tracing your body from top to bottom, from your longest toe to the tip of your nose. I would first erase the top layers of clothing, deliberately, with a scrub, feel the rough touch of a pair of jeans, detach the musketeer shirt, undo your buckle. I would also imagine that you had no body, and that I would trace the body into being (*oh, the male fantasy of the uninscribed text, the blank page*): each one of your toes, your toenails, the arch of your foot, your calf, your thighs, the small of your back, your shoulder blades, your neck, your eyebrows, your eyelashes, your nose, your lips, your teeth, your mouth. And that the end product would be you, the way you are right now.

Why is the thirst unquenchable? Because it cannot be quenched with sight. Because by definition desire is unquenchable, for it to exist, it needs to be unfulfilled; it needs to empty itself in the process of fulfillment. It needs to move from sight to touch, to taste, to smell, to hearing, build up in a crescendo, a fugue, a symphony.

And then there is the plane that delivers me to fate, to my final destination. Fool in the ship, rite of passage, geography, horizon, liminality, possibilities. And all the other strangers in the ship, cast outside, condemned to roaming from city to city, until the ship itself becomes the very home to which fools gladly return. Such a fool am I, purveyor of knowledge, Cassandra in drag (“a line, a shadow”), aware that desires, like fantasies, may not originate from the outside, but from our own minds. And in my mind you sit by my side, call the attendant and order me a drink, talk to me, tell me how much I have hurt you, and I stare at you as you talk, as you talk about structures and pain. I wonder why I do not engage you, maybe because I know that it is true, that there are some things you and I cannot do together. For I cannot imagine that you would think that I would not want to hold you, to touch your face, caress your hands, look into your eyes, see my reflection in the only mirror that reflects my image the way I would want to be seen. Oh, yes the curse!

Am I the fool with the chains that nobody else can see? Or is this the curse, both of us, condemned to fly over the earth on a particular way, me and my inability to touch, you and your thirst for touch and the inability to feel the touch. Would it not be funny? We could invent our own curse, not pushing the rock up the hill forever, or turning items into gold, but you, the fool cursed to not touch your lover, though you can touch everybody else, and me, a male Psyche, the fool who inherits the biblical curse of not looking, who cannot look at you, even though I can look at everybody else. What would be the details of this story? What would be the fragments of the curse? We can call it the Broadway curse, a call in the night, anxiety, and on the other side, pain, fear, longing, structure. What is there to say? We could turn it into a musical number, the farce, like the Victoria Beckham song in *Cabaret*, painful, yet humorous. “Mein Herr” sung by you:

You have to understand the way I am, Mein Herr
A tiger is a tiger, not a lamb, Mein Herr
You'll never turn the vinegar to jam, Mein Herr
So I do...
What I do...



We could do the number with scenes from “To Sir With Love” playing silently in the background. Self reflexivity, to make the public know that there is a farcical element in the pain, a way of looking, a way of crying, a way of loving. You could show all your vampiness in a post-modern, Halloweenish, third-wave feminist costume pretending this is a musical from the 30s during the heart of the Depression in Chicago: high heels, fishnet stockings. We could pan to the audience, and show this man crying to your number, tears streaming down his cheeks, with a big bouquet of roses ready to give to you. Would it not be funny? Would you not also cry with this scene? Maybe we could have the old Mickey Rooney do a cameo playing this part, and intercut a scene from one of the old musicals, where the young Mickey Rooney looks at Judy Garland sing and dance. Would not the pain be made greater with the farce? Do you think the audience would understand it? Would we care? Of course we would have to use the play-within-a-play format, where you could play both the feminist scholar hired as a consultant, and the cabaret singer character with whom this man falls in love. And we could have the plot line go all the way to Oscar night, with the musical now turned into a movie winning all the categories: best script, best director, best performance (by you, of course), best musical score, and then interspersing scenes of the audience clapping, going wild, scenes from the diegetic musical intercut with the audience clapping at the Oscars. And then, if we wanted to play God, at the end, we would only show one scene, to let the audiences know that we strung them along, and that the play was really a play within a play within a play. The final scene would show this lonely man at a dark warehouse-type apartment, writing at the computer, late at night (early in the morning), silent, as he writes: “the End.” This is Oscar material, I tell you.

I used to have dreams about you, about hiding. But in my dreams you were very tied to a physical need. Icarus tried to reach the sun and failed. I think of all the time when I just wanted to watch you, to revel in your sight, to talk to you, to have a drink with you, to have sushi with you and hear your moaning at the first bite. I stay quiet when you describe the texture of caviar, the burst upon your tongue. Why does the word “texture” connote sexuality? You probably know this, you understand the transference and speak to me in code. You said you wanted to bring it to me, to spread the caviar on a cracker and I said I would like to decolonize it. Another lure, into the taste of royalty. Would it not be nice if you and I could spend a whole day just talking about food like that? Make love by proxy, understand the code and just let go? How did we arrive at this code? Was it simply talking about literary texts in which you can see this transfer, à la *Like Water for Chocolate*, *Chocolat*, etc.? Or did it derive from our visiting restaurants and discovering new places? Did it derive from your sense of royalty, of traveling to distant lands and being exposed, like the prince in *The Prince and the Pauper* to different cultures, so that you can govern well, know your people? I once told you that sensuality was coded as upper class. One never thinks of sensuality in the middle of the garbage. The discourse on sensuality, from the Marquis de Sade to Bataille, is steeped in the royal abuse of the working class and the “Third World.” Just watch the Spring Break bacchanals in Mexican beach resorts.

I had another dream and realize that both of the dreams I have had lately speak of separation. At first I thought they were prophecies, but then realized that dreams only speak to fears, to realities one does not want to acknowledge. In one, I am in this town that only appears in my dreams. By the twists and turns it appears to be a colonial town. In my



dreams I know the layout of the city, the streets downtown, the intersections, and the shortcuts, but not well, as in a town one remembers from childhood, or after a long absence, a town one returns to where once one lived. There is a big event, one of those that bring the family together, like a wedding, or a baptism, or a Bar Mitzvah. You are coordinating a picture of the whole family, and as your father is the patriarch, he is in the center of the show, in front of the crowd. I am in the back of the big room, talking to somebody else, while your actions draw my attention.

Then the scene changes and I am in this store. You are married to my bother-in-law, my symbol of infidelity, three kids outside the marriage, an otherwise nice men who loves his daughters but lives his marriage in convenience. He and I are talking as you arrive, and you greet him as a wife greets a husband, with a kiss, and an easiness of the body as it relaxes close to your partner. I think to myself, of course, appearances, “el que dirán.” You say hi from the distance. I leave and you say goodbye, winking your “entendimiento.” For some reason, I have to return, and then see you leaving with my brother-in-law holding hands, happy husband and wife. You turn around and see me, and there is some sort of understanding on my part. Of course, you and him seem happy together. It is with your partner that you have your entendimiento. The easiness of your relationship with him has to do with this dishonesty. The couple of dishonesty.

In my dreams you have a partner, and I am standing outside, looking in. At first I thought it was a premonition, that is what I called the uncanny, but even as I was saying it seemed to me to be wrong, since dreams focus more on things that one needs to process, work through. So what are the dreams about? They speak of separation, and what we have at the moment is that very real separation, so in a sense they say nothing new, they just provide a narrative in which the separation seems justified. In both dreams you have a partner, which is also a reality, so there is nothing new.

I have the feeling that there is something going on that I do not know about. I have a feeling that just like you do not want us to lose our friendship, I do not want to lose the honesty in the relationship. It was interesting to hear you call our relationship friendship, but that is what it is, and has been. I have been used to being your friend because a friend stays outside and just listens, no vested interest. That is the structure we got used to. When I heard you say that you did not want to lose my friendship, I thought, but why should you? In a sense I also think my dreams deal with this honesty, I feel as though you are not being honest with me. When do the words fail? They fail when the body is used to convey messages, when it becomes a receptacle of decisions, a mark that holds all the consequences.

How does the emptiness start? How does the heart bleed through the fingers? How do tears burn the morning silence in a song, an empty chair, a lonely kitchen, a dark stairwell? How does a blank page call you into a space so you can read your soul? How does a cigarette burn your body? How can a glass of wine make the world so properly fit burning your absence? Long walks, bike rides, day-long drives, sleepless nights, an empty cell, pools that measure the distance from the shore. How do you write a letter to someone through yourself? How can distant cities fill your space? Laughter on the phone, logistics of life. The everyday. And yet you will the absence of non-dialed numbers, submit your typing fingers



to the targeted inactivity of a particular syntax, two-o'clock morning showers, tasteless gourmet coffee.

I missed you today, I listened to music in the emptiness of a house that does not see your presence, as the music filters through the air. I do so want you near me. How can you so fill my body? I thought of your body in the wee hours of the morning. And I remembered.

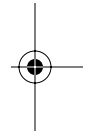
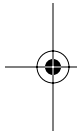
Come'ere you said
Twisting your soul into a movement
That made the bodies flow

Come'ere you said
South winds pulling currents
Towards the pupils of your eyes

Come'ere you said,
And the night turned into daylight
As I turned into you.

Remember I used to say I did not know how this story would end? The end started coming when you found yourself out of the bubble. "I have blood," you said, "I can write my name without wounds, no rupture in a line, without pain, seamless, circular, continuous, in-and-out-side." You countered my Tinker Bell with your own version of Frida, with your own pain reeking from between the letters of your poetry.

I used to think that your pain would be less painful because it was self-inflicted. Now I realize that I was wrong. But then you know, you know when you perceive yourself as contributing to dysfunction and codependency. You will the night into daylight, you wake up your friends at 4 o'clock in the morning. You go on. I saw you several times head straight for the abyss and barely managed to keep out of the way. (*I knew you would commit suicide and I walked away, I did nothing, did not linger to watch. Erased the line between metaphor and experience. I find your messages from beyond. One came from the bayou in a postcard, "thinking of you." A quetzal you gave me, the sounds of Duke Ellington, Jazz, the taste of Frida. Western Ballads, feminisms. Business cards, books as you left them.*) I used to call you the torbellino, the whirlwind, set on a course of destruction; you seemed to harm anybody who managed to be on the way. Once I went on a suicidal thousand-mile drive on two hours of sleep just to keep out of your path. Then after it was over you would blame me for not being by your side, for not trying to keep you back. And I often told you that I could not. Then you would blame me, though I merely did not want to be your co-dependant. How can two people love each other and yet manage to do so much harm to each other? You used to say that that was the only way you could harm people, when you loved them. I used to tell you that you inscribed your pain in your body, as though you were afraid to forget the pain. That is one of the classical explanations for the tattoo, you know, etching a memory upon the smoke. So you make sure that your body feels the pain





or the pleasure of remembrance, thinking through the body. The realization dawned on me when you called yourself Frida. And I saw the deer with your face, leave it to you, I thought of Saint Sebastian, you thought of Frida's doe. I remember that you would tremble in my presence; your deep look would borrow through me every time you sat across from me.

I would marvel at your ability to process information, but was often amazed at what point you would decide to only let your own logic guide you, and simply follow your own rules, catered for your benefit. That is me, you would say, deal with it. And you knew that I would deal with it, by staying out of your way. And then the cycle would start again. I perceived that you would harm yourself to harm me (*los amorosos andan como locos . . .*) arguing for the possession and agency of your own body (sleeping with yourself you called it), trading explanations for goodbyes (*siempre yéndote, siempre yéndonos, siempre, siempre, hacia alguna parte*) moving on, burning ships.

I went to the museum today, and saw Frida's "My Dress Just Hangs There." I thought of you, of your pain, of how the dress becomes the projection of personality, of the real self. And thought of the significance of the emptiness among the ruins. I then understood the dress as my epiphany and the blind spot of your feminism. Remember your reading of *Y no se lo tragó la tierra . . .*? Your laughter at the suicide, and how I responded from beyond my own unquiet grave? "There shall be one, and only one man lost. . . . One life, one life alone shall be given for the many." I had turned you into the personification of my own struggles, my fights with class, my visceral reaction to its sense of entitlement. This reason alone explains why I had dreamt you in Philly, in my own version of *The Philadelphia Story*.

Oh, how can we will our dreams into being, into a recreation of our own fantasies? (*Enterradla. I wear my grief in public, in the open air, restaurants, cafes, tapa bars, laughter. Loud rock. Empty gazes of people who knew you. Blank stares of blame. People ask about you. Snapshots of their body for my grief.*) And I translated my version of Jaime Sabines to counter your cyber message ("Hay horas, horas, horas, en que estás tan ausente que todo te lo digo") as I wrote our elegy

La despedida empieza con un hasta luego
una distancia que se alarga
un beso al aire, una caricia a deshoras
un te llamo luego, un te quiero
a las tres de la mañana.

