

“Tía Olivia Serves Wallace Stevens a Cuban Egg”

The ration books voided, there was little to eat,
so Tía Olivia ruffled four hens to serve Stevens
a fresh criollo egg. The singular image lay limp,
floating in a circle of miniature roses and vines
etched around the edges of the rough dish.
The saffron, inhuman soul staring at Stevens
who asks what yolk is this, so odd a yellow?

Tell me Señora, if you know, he petitions,
what exactly is the color of this temptation:
I can see a sun, but it is not the color of suns
nor of sunflowers, nor the yellows of Van Gogh,
it is neither corn nor school pencil, as it is,
so few things are yellow, this, even more precise.

He shakes some salt, eye to eye hypothesizing:
a carnival of hues under the gossamer membrane,
a liqueur of convoluted colors, quarter-part orange,
imbued shadows, watercolors running a song
down the spine of praying stems, but what, then,
of the color of the stems, what green for the leaves,
what color the flowers; what of order for our eyes
if I can not name this elusive yellow, Señora?

Intolerant, Tía Olivia bursts open Steven's yolk,
plunging into it with a sharp piece of Cuban toast:
It is yellow, she says, amarillo y nada más, bien?

The unleashed pigments begin to fill the plate,
overflow onto the embroidered place mats,
stream down the table and through the living room
setting all the rocking chairs in motion then

over the mill tracks cutting through cane fields,
a viscous mass downing palm trees and shacks.

In its frothy wake whole choirs of church ladies
clutch their rosary beads and sing out in Latin,
exhausted macheteros wade in the stream,
holding glinting machetes overhead with one arm;
cafeterias, '57 Chevys, uniforms and empty bottles,
mangy dogs and fattened pigs saved from slaughter,
Soviet jeeps, Bohemia magazines, park benches,
all carried in the egg lava carving the molested valley
and emptying into the sea. Yellow, Stevens relents,
Yes. But then what the color of the sea, Señora?