

Lament for the Boy Rafter

Every day on his way to school he stops briefly to smell
the sea air, look askance toward the horizon,

stare at the wind-swept coconut palm fronds, their shimmer
of light, and on his way home to the clapboard, makeshift

hut, he studies the cracks on the dusty earth, counts pebbles,
picks up twigs, and combs his fingers through scrub grass.

He reads the infected mosquito scabs on his arms, walks home
daydreaming of how wood floats on water.

He tells his father, his mother, his friends
not to wait up for him if one day he does not return.

They laugh at him, this skinny boy of nine, green
eyes, green spirit, and at night, in the waking of things lost,

he dreams of buoyancy, splintered pieces of wood, an inner tube,
black circles on the water, all line up from Santiago to Miami,

and he skips across one inner tube to another on his way North.

Mirage

When the low, heavy sky weighs like the giant lid
of a great pot upon the spirit crushed by care,
and from the whole horizon encircling us is shed
a day blacker than night, and thicker with despair.

—Charles Baudelaire

Here on the high seas, the ocean is possessed
of a thousand hues between lapis lazuli and indigo,
and on this north bound rinky-dink raft, another
family prays to Yemaya, Holy Mother of the Crossing,

to spare the lives of everyone on board.
But is it too late? The sun has blistered the skin,
ravaged the skin of old leprous San Lazaro
who dizzy stumbles overboard into the water,

disappears into the darkness, and now not even
with burnt offerings will the sea return him, a kiss
of night and air on the full moon, the children
have stopped crying, the only sound left is breath

upon a parched tongue, those who say the sea
is the great mother are liars, it is the great void.
By morning even the storm clouds dissipate,
a welcoming sign of calm and peace, the horizon

undulates, sea birds scattershot into the heavens.

Mother Under Water

She learns to stay down for good,
 water fills her ears with voices.
 They speak of this riddle of waves,
of so much plummeting,

her eyes darken, her hands reach
 for shadows, claw at them,
 become anemones in the shade
of this half-lit dream. Her efforts to push

her son along leaves her exhausted.
 In her lungs, the water heavy
 like mercury. Her fever dreams

of her precious cargo crush the night.
Underneath him she continues to drag
toward the shore, her body a ghostly
vessel nobody will witness in the depths.

When Leaving the Country of Your Birth

Will the wind remember your body, its weight
slanted against a white wall?

Will the river flood the valleys, carve a new path
into the roots of mountains?

Will palm trees bend and birth coconuts,
these yellow beacons in the blinding light?

Will buildings crumble into rubble and dust,
ruins of memory's instant flash?

Will your aunt's parrot still hang by the doorway
that leads to the patio, calling out, "*Mariposa!*"

Will the sea rush El Malecón in dangerous weather?

Will your old house stand in the shadows
of all the plantains your father planted?

Will the baobab at the corner grow wider, its elephant
skin roots sunk deep into the earth?

Who will remember you, child? Who will sigh
your name?

Who will greet you there in the old neighborhood
upon your return?

Who will say that you are now a "*mariposa*," not
a "*gusano*"?

Who will trace the bread crumbs this far out?

Blue Cuban

Is it her apparition in water?
This distance between two points
That clutches memory by the throat?

The way a speck of land, a peak
rises in the horizon, looms like wreckage.
Palm fronds sifted by winds.

Clouds bunched up over thatch roofs,
a sleek rain falling over banyans,
jacarandas and baobabs.

Is it the perfect orb of mangoes?
Soursop and papaya aroma?
When the flock of feral parrots

screech by, the dread of eternal
exile roots itself in water. Is it the poet's
song, Lorca's moment of despair,

the sound of one bata drum,
the *che-che* of chekeres? Women
dressed in white in demonstrations.

Everyone returns to water in time.
Whoever dares conjure this blueness
cannot help but surrender to it.