



LA COMANDANTE MAYA

RITA VALDIVIA

POEMAS

**ON THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE DEATH IN BOLIVIA OF ERNESTO CHE GUEVARA**

translated by Margaret Randall

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edited and designed by Lynne DeSilva-Johnson

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RITA VALDIVIA, ON THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH IN BOLIVIA OF ERNESTO CHE GUEVARA

By Margaret Randall

October 9, 2017 will mark the 50th anniversary of Ernesto Che Guevara's death in Bolivia. I was already an adult when that event shook the world. Following Guevara's capture in battle the day before, his execution was ordered by the CIA and quickly carried out by a Bolivian military official in a tiny mountain village. Those who murdered him thought they were obliterating the man and what he stood for; but their act, rather than demonstrate the defeat of his ideals, made him an instant emblem of those ideals for generations to come. Fifty years later I remember the moment as if it were yesterday.

Che's story has been represented in hundreds of books, poems, films, songs, and images displayed on posters, t-shirts and other ephemera. Some versions demonize, most idealize him, portraying him larger than life, devoid of any human frailty. What all have in common is a significant erasure of those women who participated in his struggle. Only a German named Tamara Bunke, or "Tania the Guerrilla Fighter," appears in most of those books or films, her story twisted to fit the point of view of author or filmmaker. Historians have used that lone woman as a token representative of female participation in the Latin American armed struggle movements of the era.

Although most of Che's comrades in his final doomed endeavor were men, many women also took part: as strategists, decoders,





drivers, nurses, keepers of safe houses or liaisons in the cities, or as fighters on an equal footing with their male comrades underground and in the mountains. A few held leadership positions. Here I want to honor the names of some of the female participants in Bolivia alone, and the list is inevitably partial: Tamara Bunke, Mónica Ertl, Loyola Guzmán, Amiria Murillo, Marcela Toiti, Luxer Estática del Worpo, Josefina Fargat, Marlene Ariola, Beatriz Allende, Jhenny Coler, Amalia Rada, Loila Sánchez, Graciela Rutillo, Marina Briz, Cecilia Ávila, Rita Valdivia. In 1961, Domitila Barrios de Chungara and 70 other women founded the powerful Housewives Committee at the Siglo XX tin mine. Women were involved in student strikes and union struggles. In our gender-discriminatory version of history, most of these women's names have been lost to memory. But in today's Bolivia, half of all government ministers are women, a woman is president of the Senate, 47% of all senatorial seats are held by women and women occupy 28% of all congressional seats. In Evo Morales' government, many of these women are indigenous, in other words poor women of color. Women of the 1960s paved the way for this later participation, just as Juana Azurduy and Micaela Bastides, leaders in Bolivia's anti-colonial rebellion of 1780, set an example for them.

I can think of no more fitting tribute on this fiftieth anniversary of Che's death than to bring to the forefront one of the women who took up his mantle: Rita Valdivia. She didn't hesitate to participate in this centuries-long resistance against injustice that unfolds generation after generation. When Venezuelan poet José Delpino mentioned her to me recently over tapas at a restaurant in Evanston, Illinois, I was stunned. I had researched and written a book about Guevara¹, yet had never even heard her name.

¹ *Che on My Mind*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, Duke University Press. 2013.





Rita Valdivia, or “La Comandante Maya”² as she is remembered by her revolutionary comrades, was born in Cochabamba, Bolivia on June 20, 1946. Later her father went to Venezuela to work on building a railway line in the eastern part of the country. Her mother kept her six children in Bolivia for the next two years, but eventually brought the family to join him there.

In Bolivia, Rita had gone to a Catholic primary school. Frequent childhood visits to her grandparents, who lived in the countryside, put her in touch with nature and gave her an early taste of freedom. In Venezuela, she spent important years of her adolescence and young adulthood in the city of Barcelona, state of Anzoátegui. There she studied at the Armando Reverón Art School and worked with a cultural collective called Trópico Uno. It was a time of artistic effervescence, and visual artists tended to write poetry and poets make visual art. A political awakening also characterized the young people of that time and place, largely motivated by the U.S. war in Vietnam and a growing awareness of the ways in which imperialist interests were similarly manipulating and exploiting Venezuelan youth.³

It may be difficult for people today to understand why so many young people of the 1960s and ‘70s, with brilliant futures before them, chose a mode of struggle that pitted them against such superior forces. The Cuban Revolution certainly played a central role, especially in Latin America. But those young people also felt

2 Comandante, or commander, was the highest rank in many armed struggle movements of the 1960s and ‘70s. Maya means “first” in one of the Mayan languages, but it was also the name of Rita’s best friend when she was studying in Leipzig, a young woman from Iceland.

3 This and other observations are from the film, *Tributo Homenaje a Rita Valdivia: Su memoria sigue viva* by Carlos Arratia (www.youtube/watch?v=l-w1valTL39o). Translations, Margaret Randall.





a moral imperative. The same United States that was intensifying its war in Vietnam was supporting—funding, providing weaponry and training—local forces that were oppressing their own peoples throughout the so-called third world. And it was trying to seduce them through methods that ran from sophisticated to brutal.

Shortly before his death, Che had called for “two, three, many Vietnams.”⁴ Youth such as Rita were intent on creating scenarios they believed would disperse imperialism’s forces and allow them to establish beachheads from which they might create spaces of social justice.

Some intellectuals, artists and political comrades still remember Rita from this period. Poet Gustavo Pereira describes her as having had “a tender nature, contemplative rather than extremely talkative.” Photographer Marina Briz, weeps as she says: “I think of her as someone striking the match of her own life; the match remains upright until it burns itself out. It was the fate of so many.”⁵

When Rita was 19 she moved from Barcelona to Caracas, probably to escape an abusive and controlling father. There she took classes in architecture at the University of Venezuela. This led to her traveling to Europe, where she spent two and a half years studying Art History at the Carl Marx University in Leipzig. It was there that she became more fully radicalized, writing in a letter to one of her poet friends back home: “Europe is dying [...] Please don’t write to me like St. John Perse; write in your own voice.” It was in Leipzig, as well, that Rita was recruited by the Bolivian National Liberation

4 From Ernesto Che Guevara’s Message to the Trincontinental Conference, Havana, April 16, 1967. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1967/04/16.htm>.

5 *Tributo Homenaje a Rita Valdivia: Su memoria sigue viva.*





Army (ELN, in its Spanish acronym).⁶ There is also evidence of her having visited New York, and having been in Paris during the May 1968 uprising.

Rita was active with several vanguard Venezuelan literary groups of the 1960s, among them *Tabla Redonda* and *La Pandilla de Lau-tréamont*. Venezuelan poet and cultural icon Edmundo Aray says: “Rita lived in Venezuela for a few years. I knew her: a great comrade, a great combatant, a poet of immense intensity. One of the first issues of *Rocinante*, in the 1970s, was dedicated to Rita. It included a half-page photo, several of her poems, a poem by me, and other texts. This was more than 60 years ago; it would be difficult to find a copy today.”⁷

With some effort, Aray did find a copy of that special issue of *Rocinante*, filled with documents by and about Rita. One, a letter she wrote from New York City to a friend named Lucho,⁸ provides clues to her early family life. It describes her father’s abuse and, more importantly, her response to that abuse. In Latin America in the mid 1960s, domestic violence wasn’t often mentioned, much less recognized as a product of a patriarchal system. From this letter, we not only get some sense of how Rita saw her father’s mistreatment of her sisters and brothers, but discover a young woman who suffered at the hands of patriarchy, yet was able to extrapolate from individual behavior to show how that behavior shapes society. Here are some relevant passages from this letter:

6 The ELN was the armed struggle organization that took up Che’s fight after his death.

7 Email to author, May 15, 2017. Translation MR.

8 Luis Luksic, director of the Armando Reverón school when Rita studied there, and a longtime mentor and friend. Marina Briz believes he was the positive father figure Rita never have. Luksic gave this letter to the magazine.





I'm here in this city called New York [...]. I carry with me an elastic pain from what went on in my family. From here I love them all, and when I think of their hatreds, their tactics, it roils my liver. From the lips of my sisters I've heard the horrors my father has committed these past two years. Nevertheless I, who belong to a violent lineage, continue to love him with a terrible compulsion. If he hadn't tried to mess with what was intimately mine, I myself might never have discovered it. The day he tried to invade my most secret places I roared like a lion and protected them before he could consummate his dirty work. Because I care for and nourish those places, I will always be able to walk free. I imagine he attacked my siblings in the same way, but they lacked the strength to defend what was theirs. My father looks down on them, especially the boys. And he hates me—I remember his last attempt to straighten me out: I was black and blue all over, but witness to the most outrageously sadistic act of a father against his rebel daughter. Later, you know, things defined themselves, and I took flight. Today he loves me and if I raise my voice he cries, gazing at me with his Altiplano eyes. I remember telling you he was like a Nazi. It's not true, Lucho, he just wanted to impose his idea of perfection on us, wanted to make something of each of us, and that forced us to define ourselves: either we adopt that perfection that is more rational now in its assessment of life, or we escape to find our own fields.

My father is very much like Kafka's father, and Felix—the oldest—like Kafka himself, except he doesn't write and therein lies his self-destruction. Chabela used to admire him, now it disconcerts me to see her passive behind a sales counter, listen to her talk about her beauty products, fashion, her marvelous boys and repugnant husband. Ana will be a fine professional: reserved, disciplined, long-suffering, but she doesn't understand madness. Nano (Fernando, the one most like me) is strange. He loves music and revolution, but gives himself entirely to his engineering studies and to his girlfriend; what's





more he likes to walk through the streets with her on his arm, already a sign of “normalcy.” Patricia—she’s like me—I feel like screaming when I think of the terrible trials that await her. Love her without confusing her like you did me, love her please and don’t let her sleep.

*[...] I must keep myself as I am, inside [...] I must think intensely of every Che and at the same time be Che. And at the same time be someone who studies a profession [...]*⁹

The observations of a young woman acutely attuned to and understanding of human nature, eager for her siblings to free themselves from tyrannical social norms and, above all, intent on cultivating her own deepest needs. I am curious about Rita’s relationship with her mother, unmentioned in this letter or in any other source I could find.

Like many socially conscious writers and artists of that decade, Rita was deeply moved by injustice. She was determined to fight it to the limits of her possibilities, and in 1967 traveled to Cuba where she received intelligence and counter-intelligence training. On her return to the Continent—not to Venezuela, but to the country of her birth, Bolivia—she was already a pivotal figure in the ELN. This was the political organization carrying forward Ernesto Che Guevara’s dream. Its leader, Inti Peredo,¹⁰ put her in charge of the underground movement in Cochabamba. All evidence points to the fact that, despite her young age, she did an outstanding job. On the night of July 13 to 14, 1969, she and others were to meet at a safe house in the city; Rita herself had arranged the logistics of that gathering. When they arrived, they found themselves surrounded. Some managed to escape, but Rita and others were gunned down.

9 Translation MR.

10 Inti Peredo assumed leadership of Che’s guerrilla after the latter’s death.





Upon learning of her daughter's death, Rita's mother and one of her sisters traveled to Bolivia to claim the body. Months passed. They endured a harrowing search. After a great deal of frustration, they announced in the newspaper a mass for Rita's soul. The ELN was thus made aware of their quest. Comrades knew where the authorities had the body, and helped the family recover it. Her loved ones were finally able to bury Rita.

Not surprisingly, it was difficult to come by detailed information about Rita during her time underground. But through a friend of a friend—one of those webs that seems magical, even today—I heard from a survivor who knew Rita well. He says: “Maya was her war name. She was the person responsible for us when we went to Cuba for training. I happened to be nearby the day she died. I witnessed the death of her partner, and was present at her secret burial. She has a beautiful gravesite, and those of us who remember her keep it up to this day. Inti had a lot of confidence in her, and her death in combat affected him deeply.”¹¹

Clandestine struggle tends to swallow its foot soldiers. Poetry, particularly when it rises above the ordinary, can perpetuate those who produce it. Although barely 23 when she died, Rita was already considered one of her adopted country's most promising poets. It was the 1960s, and hers was a rebel voice. It was also the voice of a mature writer who, had she lived, would surely have made an even greater mark on Latin American literature. The poems and other texts she left contain echoes of social justice themes but their power lies in their imaginative lyricism, almost surreal at times.

¹¹ Because he still lives in fear, I will not reveal the name of this witness. Translation MR.





Like the Beats in the United States, the Nadaistas in Colombia, Techo de la Ballena in Venezuela, and similar groups elsewhere, she ranted against social hypocrisy and a culture of “men in gray flannel suits.” In “Defending the Street” she writes: “Blood escapes my hands. Humanitarian blood. Shamed blood. / Vegetable sap and the babble of hunger and boredom.”

In her personal integrity, in her social analysis, in the university studies she managed to complete, and in her position within the armed struggle organization with which she chose to act, Rita seems larger than life, mature beyond her years. In all these arenas, she accomplished more than many who live twice or three times as long. Despite her youth, she had traveled widely, putting her in touch with other cultures and peoples. Her poetry, as I’ve said, was stunningly mature. She wasn’t the intellectual whose “political poetry” simply referenced injustice. And she wasn’t the activist who wrote an occasional poem, like Camillo Torres, Agostinho Neto, or Che himself. Considering how brief her life was, she left a body of work, reminiscent of Ho Chi Minh, Roque Dalton, Otto-René Castillo, and Javier Heraud. Her work was published in *Trópico Uno*, *En Haa*, and *Rocinante*—important magazines of the era—as well as in anthologies such as *Bajo la refriega* and *7 poemas* (both 1964), *En plena estación* (1966), *Por mi cuenta y riesgo* (1967), and Mario Benedetti’s *Poesía trunca* (1977).

Rita’s place in struggle seems to have been no less developed. Because of her youth and gender, it would be easy to assume that the title of commander was simply a show of respect or endearment rather than a military rank earned in battle. But we know it was, in fact, a legitimate title, bestowed upon her by the ELN’s leader. Few, if any other, 22- or 23-year old women could have earned it.





When following the multiple trails of a presence such as Rita's—testimonies from those who knew her, bits and pieces of information, clues found in the work itself—I encountered in almost equal measure the life lived and the one that might have been. The first emerges as fact, the second like a sort of hologram: what might logically have come later but, because her life was cut so short, would never be. A feminist analysis long before its time indicates that, had she survived, Rita might have contributed to the understanding of patriarchy so richly explored in subsequent decades. Her brand of activism, although misguided in the opinions of many, was on the cutting edge of struggle during her last years. Seen in broader historical context, it foreshadows the important female leadership in Bolivia today, and constitutes an important phase in the search for overall liberation. And Rita's poetry, the place where she expressed her vision most concisely, remains the best testament to her commitment, brilliance, originality and imagination.

How many unremembered men and women took part in the social justice struggles of the 1960s, '70s and '80s? They were students, professionals, laborers, farmers, loners and housewives. Each committed his- or herself to a David and Goliath fight, from which they knew death and anonymity were the most likely outcomes. At the very least, each sacrificed the comforts and rewards of family and everyday joys because they believed in a cause greater than themselves. Most revolutionary efforts of those years ended in failure. Hundreds, if not thousands, of martyrs have been forgotten. Remembering those times, someone who took part remarked: "if we had prevailed, streets would be named after us, statues erected. We failed, and so we are mostly forgotten."¹² The women were forgotten much more easily than the men. In today's world of rampant violence and corruption, the ideals for which they lived and died seem impossibly utopian.

12 Translation MR





Rita Valdivia is almost unknown outside literary circles in Venezuela and Bolivia. She remains unmentioned in the books written about Guevara's heroic gesture or its aftermath. How many other women met with a similar fate? The poems she left when she died are complex and powerful. To date they are unavailable in the United States. I have translated five of them here, in tribute to this young woman—one of many who gave their lives, the children they might have had and poems they might have written, to a dream still begging fulfillment across the continent.

Margaret Randall, Albuquerque, Spring 2017.



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POEMAS

POEMS





Aullido poema octogonal

En el graznido de mi noche
más largo que un pensamiento apelmazado
por la atmósfera;
los deseos se cuajan como alimento vital
violados por el aire.

Yo subía por las gradas desgastadas del tiempo;
cada paso removía la huella de mis ancestros,
y su aullido rompía el silencio octogonal.

Buscaba inspirarme en tu risa;
pero tu risa flotaba estática en el vacío,
tratando de llamar la atención
de los harapientos personajes
que desfilaban por filas verticales.

La mezcla de vida y hastío
se escapa por las mucosas
negando los caminos,
las manos diligentes,
los ojos purulentos de sabiduría,
los instintos metidos en cascarones.

Sobre la noche, sobre la risa vacía,
sobre mi sombra engrandecida por la fiebre,
se mezcla la lluvia de indiferencia
fossilizando ideas premáticas.

(Original published in *Trópico Uno* #3 (February-March 1965))





Octagonal Howl Poem

In the cawing of my night
more drawn out than a thought
compacted by the atmosphere;
desires curdle like some vital sustenance
raped by air.

I climbed bleachers worn by time;
each step removed my ancestors' footprints,
and its howl shattered an octagonal silence.

I searched for inspiration in your laughter;
but your laughter floated static in the void,
begging for the attention
of the ragged ones
parading in vertical lines.

A mix of life and weariness escapes
through mucous membranes
negating pathways,
diligent hands,
eyes festering with wisdom,
all those armored instincts.

Above the night, above the empty laughter,
above my shadow magnified by fever,
the rain of indifference falls,
fossilizing dogmatic old ideas.

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Cuestión de lógica

Vivo en una casa herida, por eso, amigo, quería preguntarte si las filas de casas y los apartamentos tienen un agujero triste en su piso de mármol, en sus paredes o en los cuatro ángulos que hacen la casa.

No, no te voy a decir que soy la muchachita inocente que se pasea sin decoro (quiero decir, con la parte inferior del cuerpo al aire) por las calles de una ciudad, ni que la casa en que vivo tiene una ventana por cada punto cardinal, ni que me arden las manos porque anoche en un descuido me picaron las estrellas de gamma.

Tampoco voy a decirte que te comprendo, ni quiero que me comprendas. Sé que no te importan mis complejos amontonados durante x años, esto lo deduzco porque a mí me sucede tal con los tuyos. Claro que no desquito la posibilidad de que nos importe demasiado y nos llamemos humanos por puro gusto de clasificarnos. Bueno, no tan por puro gusto, sino porque comemos, o, mejor dicho, necesitamos comer 3 veces al día y dormir 8 horas... sin lo cual tú y yo seríamos sencillamente catafalcos de corales.

No, no vivo en una casa que tiene puntos cardinales por ventanas. Vivo en la cuadratura de un círculo mordida por los terremotos que aquí abundan. Sabes, voy a comunicarte un secreto, aunque no te importe: bajo la sombra que me cobija (es decir, el omoplato de un elefante) florecen los dedos y el ansia por echar humo y madurar más que la levadura fermentada.





A Question of Logic

I live in a wounded house and so, my friend, I want to ask if the rows of houses and apartment buildings have a sad hole in their marble floors, in their walls or in the four corners that determine a dwelling.

No, no, I won't say I am the innocent young girl walking about immodestly through city streets (I mean naked from the waist down). Nor do I mean that the house I live in has a window at each cardinal point, or that my hands smart because last night, in a moment of carelessness, they were burned by gamma ray stars.

Nor will I say I understand you, or want you to understand me. I know you don't care about the neuroses I've developed over x number of years. I know this because the same is true for me when I think of yours. Of course, I cannot discard the possibility that we may care too much, and they will call us human for the pure joy of labeling us. Well, not simply for the pure joy, but because we eat, or rather, need to eat three times a day and sleep eight hours... without which you and I would be reduced to coral shells.

No, I don't live in a house with cardinal points for windows. I live in a squared circle bitten by the earthquakes so endemic to this place. Listen, I will tell you a secret even if you don't care about it: beneath the shadow that shelters me (I mean the shoulder blade of an elephant) grow fingers and a desire greater than fermented yeast to let off steam and mature.





El firmamento acapara todas las axilas, entre ellas la tuya y la mía (ves que no somos tan distintos), por eso sientes cansancio al despertar de un sueño reparador o laxado e inconforme después de amar. No, amigo, pueden no importarme tus callos o a ti la debilidad de mis uñas, pero vivimos en una ciudad que se barre todas las noches y durante el día se ensucia, es lógico, tampoco en nuestra ciudad (conste que no sabemos si tenemos dios) existe la envidia sino en las películas. Lo que existe es necesario entre esto —tú aburrido de escucharme y yo aburrida de buscar temas—. Dime si no hubieran malhechores —santos, como los llamo yo—, sucedería que no hubiera necesidad de cárceles, al no existir cárceles estarían de más los carceleros y al faltar carceleros se rompería irremediabilmente nuestra sociedad que tiene siglos edificándose.

Entonces tú y yo, además mi casa y su arquitectura, de la cual me he olvidado y —por cuestión de infalible lógica— esto que digo: “no estamos de más”.





The firmament gathers all armpits, among them yours and mine (you see, we aren't so different). That's why you feel tired upon waking from a restorative dream, or listless and non-compliant after making love. No, my friend, your calluses may not matter to me nor the fragility of my fingernails to you, but we live in a city that sweeps itself clean each night and dirties itself again each day. It makes sense. Not even in our city, except in the movies (and remember, we don't know if god accompanies us) does envy exist. What exists is necessary to all of this—you bored with listening to me and I bored with searching for subject matter—. Tell me, if there were no criminals—saints, as I call them—, wouldn't there be no need for prisons. If there were no prisons, wardens would not be needed. And without wardens, our society that has been constructing itself for centuries, would break apart.

Then you and I, as well as my house and its architecture, which I've forgotten about and—by a question of infallible logic—all point to what I say: “we are not superfluous.”

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Para Eduardo

I.

Se le cayeron los hombros. Con esto comenzó su desmoronamiento, sucedido después de los nuestros. Él dejó lo prometido aunque no pudo encaminarlo. Se nos autorizó teledirigirlo desde nuestras ruinas, empezamos a recolectar el olor de huella humanas para que pudiera pasar desapercibido. Al lanzarlo, sus reacciones fueron las de un extraviado, pero nosotras ya nada podíamos hacer.

Empezó a caminar. Era magnífica su estela que evocaba la posesión de los pulpos marinos, pero lo confundía el jadeo de los perros y el de las mujeres prontas a parir. Lo hacían nulo los ruidos; los tonos de las voces embarraron su estela. Su mirada empezó a captar gestos dementes, y nos gritó, diciendo que la guía que le habíamos dado para que señalara un camino fresco estaba basada sólo en mentiras. Dijo que ellos se escupen en los ojos, que meten sus testículos en las bocas de sus madres, que se persiguen y no hay un rostro sin cicatriz o lepra.

Eso gritó él, haciendo estremecer nuestros vientres y nada pudimos hacer para impedir su autodestrucción.

En las noches corría desesperado buscando a los suicidas, y al encontrarlos metía su cabeza en las cajas torácicas. El olor de las huellas se posesionó de su noble naturaleza en abandono, y el distinguirlo era difícil hasta para nosotras.

Sus ojos se volvieron rojos.





For Eduardo

I.

His shoulders slumped. That's how his collapse began, following our own. Although unable to oversee it, he left what was promised. He authorized us to direct it by remote control, from our ruins, and we began to collect the smell of human tracks so he could pass unobserved. When he pounced upon it, his reactions were those of a lost man, but there was no longer anything we could do.

He began to walk. His trail was magnificent, reminiscent of a sea octopus, but he was confused by the panting of dogs and of women about to give birth. Noises reduced him to nothing; the sound of voices covered his wake in mud. His gaze began to attract crazed gestures, and he shouted at us that the guides we had provided to show him a new path was doomed by lies. He said they spit in his eyes, stuff their testicles into their mothers' mouths, and not a face remains devoid of a scar or leprosy.

That's what he shouted, causing our entrails to shudder, and we could do nothing to impede his self-destruction.

He ran desperate through the nights looking for suicides, and when he found them forced his head into their thoracic cavities. The stench of those tracks took possession of what was once his noble nature, and distinguishing it was difficult even for us.

His eyes turned red.

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II.

¿Qué?, te preguntaste, pero ya eras hijo de familia. Gritaste y el aire de todos los días ya estaba dirigiendo tus pulmones. Sin embargo reflexionaste, hiciste conciencia de esto. Voy a realizarme por los demás, voy a calmar el ardor de estos pequeños asesinos de pájaros, voy a construir un motor para hacer sonreír corazones y llenar barrigas —pensaste y pensaste— voy a bajar a Dios del Penthouse, voy a chicotearlo por beberse la leche de las recién paridas. Planeaste todo esto, pese a que Dios explotaba en ese momento una bomba que tiene la facultad de desmenuzar lo racional.

Verificaste el alcance de tus nervios, de tu carne, la agudeza de tus ojos, la resistencia de tu estómago. Mañana.

Tu arma, tú mismo, tu camisa, tu pantalón, tus cinco dedos parecidos a los de un pintor. Todo estaba en orden. Te despediste del olor de lo pasado. Soy un pájaro, pensaste, soy, mañana buscaré mi material en la matriz del mar, la combinaré con el huano de serpientes multicolores. Embalsamaré pieles, invertiré la expresión corriente de los terrícolas y la angustia del café. Al día siguiente amaneciste muerto. Cadáver.

En las tierras tropicales son frecuentes los decesos repentinos. Amén.

Leipzig, mayo de 1967.





II.

What? you asked yourself, but already you were the well-bred son. You screamed but by now everyday air possessed your lungs. Still, you reflected, becoming conscious of it: I will make something of myself for the sake of others, I will calm the fires of these small assassins of birds, I will construct a motor to make hearts smile and fill bellies—you thought and thought—I'm going to drag God down from his Penthouse, flog him for drinking the milk of newborns. You planned all this, but at that very moment God exploded a bomb capable of shredding all that is rational.

You tested the reach of your nerves, your flesh, the intensity of your eyes, the resistance of your stomach. Tomorrow.

Your weapon, you yourself, your shirt, your pants, your five fingers resembling those of a painter. All in order. You bid farewell to the scent of the past. I am a bird, you thought, I am, tomorrow I will look for what I need to build my nest in the sea's womb, I will mix my materials with the droppings of multicolored serpents. I will embalm skins, invert the ordinary expression of earthlings and the anguish of coffee. The next day you woke up dead. A corpse.

In tropical lands, sudden deaths are frequent.
Amen.

Leipzig, May 1967.





Defensa a la calle

Se han desparramado las luciérnagas
sobre el rostro anémico del río.
Las algas que se arrastran son faldas
de prostitutas amantes de peces
y raíces.

Cierro la mano,
contengo una risa azul enredada en historias
de plazas, de cines, de noches calurosas
asfixiadas por la soledad del eco.
Entre mis dedos se mezclan los niños
mostrando su desnudez al sol.
Se escabullen por la línea de la vida;
los triángulos.

Los puntos abren sus labios
para contar trozos arrugados de recuerdo;
y la lluvia, el granizo, los tapa de una bofetada.

De mis manos escapa sangre.
Sangre humanitaria. Sangre avergonzada.
Savia vegetal y balbuceos de hambre y hastío.

Pasa un hombre de frente arrugada
con el aliento fétido como sus ojos.
Lo aprieto hasta sentir que su hambre
hinca los dientes en mi carne
y lo veo transportarse por los ferrocarriles





Defending the Street

They have scattered the fireflies
over the river's anemic face.
The algae they drag are the skirts
of prostitutes, lovers of fish
and roots.

I close my hand,
Repress a blue laugh tangled in stories
of city squares, movie houses, sweltering nights
asphyxiated by the loneliness of echoes.
Between my fingers children clamor
displaying their nakedness to the sun.
They get away along the life line;
triangles.

Periods part their lips
counting wrinkled bits of memory;
and the rain, the hail, slap them into submission.

Blood escapes my hands.
Humanitarian blood. Shamed blood.
Vegetable sap and the babble of hunger and boredom.

A man with creased brow passes by
his breath as sour as his eyes.
I clasp him to me until I feel his hunger
sinking its teeth in my flesh
and watch him traveling on the rails of my

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y trata de mi sangre... lo veo; mi sangre se agita
de escupir esa sobra ajena;
pero yo no lo detengo y le grito,
entra más al fondo, más... más.

Me he cansado de retener otros mundos
en mi puño.
Lo abro de golpe.

El viento estremece y los niños
y la sangre y la savia,
se embadurnan en el cieno;
en la tierra se mezclan con los excrementos
del tiempo,
con los escupitajos del dios yanky,
del dios europeo.

Las plantas de mis pies arden.
Siento el paso de un tropel de formas
que van abriendo las puertas de mis entrañas,
de mis nervios, de mi alma...

Corren y vuelven a guarecerse en mis manos,
como poros, como piel, como sangre...
Cierro los ojos... no los detengo.
¡Cierro los ojos!

A mi alrededor se mezclen los gritos del río
con las garras del cielo que finge dormir.





blood... I watch him; my blood is agitated
and tries to spit him out;
but I don't hold him back and shout:
go deeper, more... more.

I am tired of holding other worlds
in my fist.
I open it suddenly.

The wind shudders and the children
and the blood and the sap
are covered in mud;
on earth they mix with time's
excrement,
with the gobs of spit of the yankee god,
the European god.

The soles of my feet are on fire.
I feel a horde of figures passing by
parting the doors of my entrails,
of my nerves, of my soul...

They run and once again take refuge in my hands,
like pores, like skin, like blood...
I close my eyes... I do not stop them.
I close my eyes!

On all sides the river's screams confuse themselves
with the claws of a sky that pretends to sleep.





Conclusiones

He medido nuestro mundo con el de los virus.
Conclusiones sarnosas, casi egoístas. Ellos no necesitan la ceremonia del matrimonio para cohabitar, ni necesitan ir a la cárcel por haberse comido a sus descendientes. Tampoco lloran al chocarse con el monstruo oscuro, imponente, que les obligue a suplicar y cavar la tierra buscando fe.

Busqué entonces medirme con lo infinito. Yo ante una noche cualquiera, queriendo atravesar la estratósfera para mirar algo de aquello raro y misterioso, grité, blasfemando pero sólo logré el insulto de mis congéneres y la más seca impasibilidad de lo no visto.

Entonces pretendí dormir, para ver si mi esencia tenía libre acceso a otro sistema solar. Inútil, mi sueño paseaba por los mismos pozos cotidianos sin dejar de jugar con el maldito ácido sulfúrico, mintiendo, riendo, con la careta de carne. El lago de convencionalismos, la falsa guitarra, la que tratan de comprarme para inventar contracciones. Estaba presente.

Pretendí no mirar a los astros, hacerme lógica y vivir mascando silogismos;

Persigue y vive lo que se recuerda

Recuerdo muchos muertos

Viven los muertos.





Conclusions

I have measured our world with that of viruses.
Immoral conclusions, almost egotistical. They do not need
the marriage ceremony to live together, nor do they go
to prison for devouring their descendants. Neither do they cry
when faced with the dark and imposing monster who obliges them
to plead and dig in the earth searching for faith.

Then I tried to measure myself against the infinite. On any
old night I wanted to pierce the stratosphere and gaze
upon the rare and mysterious. I shouted. I blasphemed.
But I only ended up insulting my fellow humans
and the unseen's driest indifference.

I pretended to sleep, to see if my essence had easy access
to another solar system. Useless, my dream
traveled to the same old cesspools while continuing to play
with that awful sulfuric acid, lying, laughing, wearing its mask of flesh.
The lake of social conventions, the false guitar, the one they try
to buy me to provoke contractions. I was there.

I pretended not to look at the stars, to be logical
and live ruminating arguments.
Go on and live what you remember
I remember many dead
Long live the dead.





Otra conclusión de paloma que acaba de expirar, su voz casi me extorsiona para invocar a un dios y busco loca entre la pleura de mis pulmones, en el ventrículo izquierdo, una respuesta fisiológica.

Nada. Es mejor esperar con las manos abiertas la respuesta del sol.





Another conclusion by the recently expired dove, its voice
almost forces me to invoke a god and, crazed,
I search for a physiological answer
in the lining of my lungs, in my left ventricle.

Nothing. Better to wait open-handed for the sun's response.

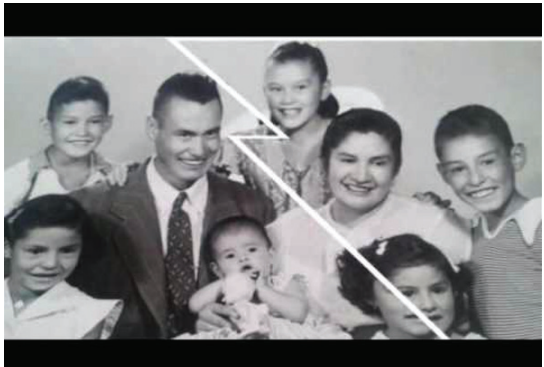


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Rare photos of Rita Valdivia, dates unknown -- at right she appears at the middle, in the top, as a child with her family.



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photo: Chris Felver



Margaret Randall (New York, 1936) is a poet, essayist, oral historian, translator, photographer and social activist. She lived in Latin America for 23 years (in Mexico, Cuba, and Nicaragua). From 1962 to 1969 she and Mexican poet Sergio Mondragón co-edited *EL CORNO EMPLUMADO / THE PLUMED HORN*, a bilingual literary quarterly that published some of the best new work of the sixties. When she came home in 1984, the government ordered her deported because it found some of her writing to be “against the good order and happiness of the United States”. With

the support of many writers and others, she won her case in 1989. Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, she taught at several universities, most often Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. Randall’s most recent poetry titles include *AS IF THE EMPTY CHAIR / COMO SI LA SILLA VACIA*, *THE RHIZOME AS A FIELD OF BROKEN BONES*, *ABOUT LITTLE CHARLIE LINDBERGH*, *SHE BECOMES TIME*, and *THE MORNING AFTER: POETRY & PROSE IN A POST-TRUTH WORLD* (all from Wings Press). *CHE ON MY MIND* (a feminist poet’s reminiscence of Che Guevara, published by Duke University Press), and *MORE THAN THINGS* (essays, from The University of Nebraska Press) are other recent titles. *HAYDEE SANTAMARIA, CUBAN REVOLUTIONARY: SHE LED BY TRANSGRESSION* was released by Duke in 2015. *EXPORTING REVOLUTION: CUBA’S GLOBAL SOLIDARITY* was published by Duke in 2017. Two of Randall’s photographs are in the Capitol Art Collection in Santa Fe. She has also devoted herself to translation, producing *WHEN RAINS BECOME FLOODS* by Lurgio Galván Sánchez and *ONLY THE ROAD / SOLO EL CAMINO*, an anthology of eight decades of Cuban poetry (both also published by Duke). Red Mountain Press in Santa Fe and The Operating System in Brooklyn have brought out her translations of individual Cuban poets. Randall received the 2017 *Medalla al Mérito Literario*, awarded by *Literatura en el Bravo* in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. She lives in Albuquerque with her partner (now wife) of more than 30 years, the painter Barbara Byers, and travels extensively to read, lecture and teach.





GLOSSARIUM: UNSILENCED TEXTS AND MODERN TRANSLATIONS

The Operating System's *Glossarium: Unsilenced Texts* series was established in early 2016 in an effort to recover silenced voices outside and beyond the familiar poetic canon, seeking out and publishing both contemporary translations and little known (and unknown) out of print texts, in particular those under siege by restrictive regimes and silencing practices in their home (or adoptive) countries.

The term "Glossarium" derives from latin/greek and is defined as "a collection of glosses or explanations of words, especially of words not in general use, as those of a dialect, locality or an art or science, or of particular words used by an old or a foreign author." The series was initiated by and is curated by Managing Editor Lynne DeSilva-Johnson, with the help of contributing editors Ariel Resnikoff and Stephen Ross, as well as a wide range of global allies and friends.

Ashraf Fayadh's "Instructions Within," in a full Arabic-English dual-language translation, was the first book in this new series, preceding Gregory Randall's award winning memoir of life in Cuba, *To Have Been There Then (Estar Allí Entonces)*. Three additional parallel Spanish-English translations by Margaret Randall follow in 2017-18 -- Chely Lima's *Lo Que Les Dijo El Licántropo / What the Werewolf Told Them*, *La Comandante Maya*, and *Viaje de Regreso / Return Trip*, Cuban poet Israel Dominguez's striking poetry, with a beautiful cover featuring Havana street art by Jose Parla and JR.

The fall of 2017 also sees the publication of an expanded edition of the out of print 1984 collaborative text, *Flower World Variations*, by poet Jerome Rothenberg and groundbreaking digital artist Harold Cohen, originally produced as a limited print from Membrane Press.

2018 will also see a dual language Farsi-English edition of *The Book of Sounds* by Mehdi Navid, translated by Tina Rahimi, with original cover art by Iman Raad.





WHY PRINT / DOCUMENT?

*The Operating System uses the language “print document” to differentiate from the book-object as part of our mission to distinguish the act of documentation-in-book-FORM from the act of publishing as a backwards facing replication of the book’s agentive *role* as it may have appeared the last several centuries of its history. Ultimately, I approach the book as TECHNOLOGY: one of a variety of printed documents (in this case bound) that humans have invented and in turn used to archive and disseminate ideas, beliefs, stories, and other evidence of production.*

Ownership and use of printing presses and access to (or restriction of printed materials) has long been a site of struggle, related in many ways to revolutionary activity and the fight for civil rights and free speech all over the world. While (in many countries) the contemporary quotidian landscape has indeed drastically shifted in its access to platforms for sharing information and in the widespread ability to “publish” digitally, even with extremely limited resources, the importance of publication on physical media has not diminished. In fact, this may be the most critical time in recent history for activist groups, artists, and others to insist upon learning, establishing, and encouraging personal and community documentation practices.

With The OS’s print endeavors I wanted to open up a conversation about this: the ultimately radical, transgressive act of creating PRINT /DOCUMENTATION in the digital age. It’s a question of the archive, and of history: who gets to tell the story, and what evidence of our life, our behaviors, our experiences are we leaving behind? We can know little to nothing about the future into which we’re leaving an unprecedentedly digital document trail — but we can be assured that publications, government agencies, museums, schools, and other institutional powers that be will continue to leave BOTH a digital and print version of their production for the official record. Will we?

As a (rogue) anthropologist and long time academic, I can easily pull up many accounts about how lives, behaviors, experiences — how THE STORY of a time or place — was pieced together using the deep study of correspondence, notebooks, and other physical documents which are no longer the norm in many lives and practices. As we move our creative behaviors towards digital note taking, and even audio and video, what can we predict about future technology that is in any way assuring that our stories will be accurately told – or told at all? How will we leave these things for the record?

In these documents we say:

WE WERE HERE, WE EXISTED, WE HAVE A DIFFERENT STORY

*- Lynne DeSilva-Johnson, Founder/Managing Editor,
THE OPERATING SYSTEM, Brooklyn NY 2016*

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TITLES IN THE PRINT: DOCUMENT COLLECTION

An Absence So Great and Spontaneous It Is Evidence of Light - Anne Gorrick [2018]
Chlorosis - Michael Flatt and Derrick Mund [2018]
Sussuros a Mi Padre - Erick Sáenz [2018]
Sharing Plastic - Blake Nemec [2018]
The Book of Sounds - Mehdi Navid (trans. Tina Rahimi) [2018]
Abandoners - Lesley Ann Wheeler [2018]
Jazzercise is a Language - Gabriel Ojeda-Sague [2018]
Death is a Festival - Anis Shivani [2018]
Return Trip / Viaje Al Regreso; Dual Language Edition -
Israel Dominguez,(trans. Margaret Randall) [2018]
Born Again - Ivy Johnson [2018]
Singing for Nothing - Wally Swist [2018]
One More Revolution - Andrea Mazzariello [2017]
Fugue State Beach - Filip Marinovich [2017]
Lost City Hydrothermal Field - Peter Milne Greiner [2017]
The Book of Everyday Instruction - Chloe Bass [2017]
In Corpore Sano : Creative Practice and the Challenged Body
[Anthology, 2017] Lynne DeSilva-Johnson and Jay Besemer, co-editors
Love, Robot - Margaret Rhee[2017]
La Comandante Maya - Rita Valdivia (tr. Margaret Randall) [2017]
The Furies - William Considine [2017]
Nothing Is Wasted - Shabnam Piryaee [2017]
Mary of the Seas - Joanna C. Valente [2017]
Secret-Telling Bones - Jessica Tyner Mehta [2017]
CHAPBOOK SERIES 2017 : INCANTATIONS
featuring original cover art by Barbara Byers
sp. - Susan Charkes; Radio Poems - Jeffrey Cyphers Wright; Fixing a Witch/Hexing the
Stitch - Jacklyn Janeksela; cosmos a personal voyage by carl sagan ann druyan steven
sotor and me - Connie Mae Oliver
Flower World Variations, Expanded Edition/Reissue - Jerome
Rothenberg and Harold Cohen [2017]
Island - Tom Haviv [2017]
What the Werewolf Told Them / Lo Que Les Dijo El Licantropo -
Chely Lima (trans. Margaret Randall) [2017]
The Color She Gave Gravity - Stephanie Heit [2017]
The Science of Things Familiar - Johnny Damm [Graphic Hybrid, 2017]
agon - Judith Goldman [2017]
To Have Been There Then / Estar Alli Entonces - Gregory Randall
(trans. Margaret Randall) [2017]





Instructions Within - Ashraf Fayadh [2016]
Arabic-English dual language edition; Mona Kareem, translator
Let it Die Hungry - Caitis Meissner [2016]
A GUN SHOW - Adam Sliwinski and Lynne DeSilva-Johnson;
So Percussion in Performance with Ain Gordon and Emily Johnson [2016]
Everybody's Automat [2016] - Mark Gurarie
How to Survive the Coming Collapse of Civilization [2016] - Sparrow
CHAPBOOK SERIES 2016: OF SOUND MIND
*featuring the quilt drawings of Daphne Taylor
Improper Maps - Alex Crowley; While Listening - Alaina Ferris;
Chords - Peter Longofono; Any Seam or Needlework - Stanford Cheung
TEN FOUR - Poems, Translations, Variations [2015] - Jerome Rothenberg,
Ariel Resnikoff, Mikhl Likht (w/ Stephen Ross)
MARILYN [2015] - Amanda Ngoho Reavey

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2015: OF SYSTEMS OF
*featuring original cover art by Emma Steinkraus
Cyclorama - Davy Knittle; The Sensitive Boy Slumber Party Manifesto
- Joseph Cuillier; Neptune Court - Anton Yakovlev; Schema - Anurak Saelow
SAY/MIRROR [2015; 2nd edition 2016] - JP HOWARD
Moons Of Jupiter/Tales From The Schminke Tub [plays, 2014] - Steve Danziger

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2014: BY HAND
Pull, A Ballad - Maryam Parhizkar; Can You See that Sound - Jeff Musillo
Executive Producer Chris Carter - Peter Milne Grenier;
Spooky Action at a Distance - Gregory Crosby;

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2013: WOODBLOCK
*featuring original prints from Kevin William Reed
Strange Coherence - Bill Considine; The Sword of Things - Tony Hoffman;
Talk About Man Proof - Lancelot Runge / John Kropa; An Admission as a Warning
Against the Value of Our Conclusions - Alexis Quinlan





DOC U MENT

/däky ə m ə nt/

First meant “instruction” or “evidence,” whether written or not.

noun - a piece of written, printed, or electronic matter that provides information or evidence or that serves as an official record
verb - record (something) in written, photographic, or other form
synonyms - paper - deed - record - writing - act - instrument

[Middle English, *precept*, from Old French, from Latin *documentum*, example, proof, from *docere*, to teach; see *dek-* in Indo-European roots.]

Who is responsible for the manufacture of value?

Based on what supercilious ontology have we landed in a space where we vie against other creative people in vain pursuit of the fleeting credibilities of the scarcity economy, rather than freely collaborating and sharing openly with each other in ecstatic celebration of MAKING?

While we understand and acknowledge the economic pressures and fear-mongering that threatens to dominate and crush the creative impulse, we also believe that ***now more than ever we have the tools to relinquish agency via cooperative means***, fueled by the fires of the Open Source Movement.

Looking out across the invisible vistas of that rhizomatic parallel country we can begin to see our community beyond constraints, in the place where intention meets resilient, proactive, collaborative organization.

Here is a document born of that belief, sown purely of imagination and will. When we document we assert.

We print to make real, to reify our being there.

When we do so with mindful intention to address our process, to open our work to others, to create beauty in words in space, to respect and acknowledge the strength of the page we now hold physical, a thing in our hand... we remind ourselves that, like Dorothy: *we had the power all along, my dears.*

THE PRINT! DOCUMENT SERIES

is a project of

the trouble with bartleby

in collaboration with

the operating system

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