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Orlando Ricardo Menes

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Prairie Schooner Book Prize in Poetry
Editor Kwame Dawes

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Fetish: Poems

Orlando Ricardo Menes

University of Nebraska Press | Lincoln and London

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I. Title.

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Set in Arno Pro by Laura Wellington.

Designed by J. Vadnais.

for my wife Ivis and
our two children,
Valerie and Adrian

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From my North of cold whistled in a sepulchral South,
Her South of pine and coral and coralline sea,
Her home, not mine, in the ever-freshened Keys
—Wallace Stevens, “Farewell to Florida”

In dusk, as though this island lifted, floated
In Indian baths . . .
—Hart Crane, “Island Quarry”

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The Evansville Review: “Tantrums”

The Fiddlehead: “Panegyric for the Condor” and “Parable”

Huizache: “Den of the Lioness”

Image: “El Cristo de Piedra”

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Fetish

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1. Ars Poetica

Ay, venga, paloma, venga
y cuénteme usted su pena.
—Nicolás Guillén, “Balada”

O come, dove, come
and tell me your sorrows.
“Ballad”

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Courtyard of Clotheslines, Angel Hill

Though dark clouds hint the kind of rain
that strafes a city, the long drought has made
fresh water scarce as milk or gasoline.
Sand like raw sugar blows from Gabon,
burying creek and aqueduct alike,
even agaves wither in tin-can gardens,
and the women of Angel Hill make do
with shortages more numerous than bristles
on a pig. No meat today? They grind
plantain peels or pickle mop rags. No soap?
They churn clothes in boiled seawater,
rig sisal lines to iron balconies that crisscross
the stone courtyard like a cat's cradle,
and because Havana Bay is so close,
wayward gusts wreck the frazzled rope—
a darned diaper or threadbare blouse
tossed like some injured bird astray
in cumuli that scud Caribbean shores.
While clothes can be replaced by barter
or theft, those kin lost at sea are grieved
in shrines of patched photos, wild flowers,
the clay and cowrie-eyed Eleggua, “way opener,”
mollified by rum-soaked tobacco,
these desperate men and women, called *escoria*,
scum, by the government, who take

to the Florida Straits on rafts stitched
from boards, wire mesh, inner tubes,
whose hasty provisions fall overboard
in the high swells, who clamor to María
or Yemayá for sweet water, calm seas,
dry land, then plunge into the waves
when angels whisper from the brine.