

Regina Swain

The Devil Also Dances in the Aloha

It so happens that the young lady,
and this was her secret,
also had her whims

—Chico Buarque

Saturday night fever. The city remains the same; it doesn't matter how much it rains or how much fades. The Border stays the same: Free Zone since it was only a little isle named California.

The bars, which remain the same, are dressed in colors to attract the unwary.

It's Holy Week.

In the Aloha, the lights paint the women's hair. "Only delight and pure fun" dances the black woman Angustias, balancing her hips dangerously; sticking out, her gut confronts the compass, one two three, turn and to one side.

There's nothing better than to dance cheek to cheek, body to body, black skin on brown skin.

The lamps are multiformed globes suspended among smoke tasting of artificial fruit; there, where all is possible, colors take on form and solidify.

"We're two children, talking madly," sings the blonde Yuri through the loudspeakers while the Clairol girls are stars for a night. Stockings on stockings, So many girdles! the *décolletage*, sad, are an open, empty mouth.

Wolf-men sharpen their fangs at the bar with two or three beers, while the round black Angustias turns and turns on her axis, swinging her enormous rear-end.

In one corner, with a bored face, a young girl rejects invitations to dance with the gesture of a disobedient girl. No one is like she is, white, smelling of a recent bath, and long hair—a curtain held by two combs: she's left her house without asking permission and now her breasts—smallish—are delineated through this white sea of her clothes, betraying her.

No one catches her eye. She dances with no one, and they tell their girl-friends that she has prayed to the saints to send her a handsome man, swearing to dance with him although he be the devil himself.

"Saint Herbert, let him not be one-eyed . . ." a tall, blond, blue-eyed type comes through the door heavy-duty and with a pair of cuff-links James Bond style. It's the Devil Jimenez, a respectable judge, man of the law in the service of the people.

(Sure, sure, Jimenez is a fabulous devil, metaphoric but a devil still).

"Saint Sebastian, let him be gallant . . ." Dozens of women's eyes give the newly arrived the once-over.

"Saint Saturnine, let him be refined . . ." Jimenez adjusts his tie and moves through the bar with studied disdain. The bored young girl in the corner adjusts her eyelashes. The Devil, very James Bond, very Jimenez, approaches.

"Saint Sylvan, may he be loaded . . ." The handsome man with the cuff-links asks for a *whiskey straight*, red label, and slugs it down in one swallow.

"Saint Neftali, let him see me . . ." The Devil observes her and time stops a moment, like a cordless toy (the funny black

Angustias sees her, stopped in the middle of a complicated pirouette).

"Saint Clodomiro, let him dance with me . . ." The young girl does not lose her composure even with the most violent steps, slim throat and earrings, coquettish sweater slipping off her left shoulder, she spins and spins around the metaphorical devil who dances in place with little tiny steps.

Jimenez is not a happy devil. He stopped being one when the Catholic Church warned his school friends that "one does NOT play with the devil." So now he bums from bar to bar, party to party, looking to recapture his lost childhood. So he frowns with a gesture that seems enchanting to the bored girl from the corner.

"Enchanter . . ." sings a honey voice while the couples dance clasped together on the dance floor, and there's nothing better than to dance arm in arm . . . if weren't for the light . . . light . . . llliiiggghht!

The Aloha has gone dark, and the huge and mustachioed bouncers move quickly: no one may leave without paying, no one can take advantage of the panic, no one can . . . but in a matter of seconds all returns to normal, all except . . .

The white-dressed young girl is found thrown on the floor with combs and everything. There are no signs of the Devil Jimenez, who seems to have left without paying the bill, and smoke with an artificial taste has been substituted for a disagreeable odor of sulfur and burnt skin. The girl sobs on the parquet floor and moves her hand to her ass; her girlfriends, who have drawn near to see what's happening, are horrified: where the hand of the handsome Devil was placed a few minutes ago there is a scorch on her dress. "Saint Ignacio, how hot the boy . . ."

A patrol is heard in the middle of the general panic. She of the white dress and her girlfriends flee, crying, swearing never again to go out without asking permission.

The Border remains the same.

In the Aloha, the lights paint the hair of the tourists who look on amazed at the black stain that the devil left on the dance floor. An announcer calls out from the entrance:

"Come in, come in, friend, we have little hairs of the devil, bits of cloth, infernal sulfur to bathe you in, come in, friend, right here is where the devil dances."

—translated by Harry Polkinhorn

Señorita Superman and the Instant Soup Generation

There are days when beer
won't cool you down,
tequila won't warm you up,
and you can't do either

A hurried bath at seven; nude and about to get into the tiny
body-wash, she gets her first surprise:

NO HOT WATER

She thinks she hears giggling and immediately thinks:
"I must still be asleep."

Coffee! A cup of coffee would be great; that would manage to
get her eyes open. She gropes in the dark for a match.

SSSCRATCH,
she lights it.

She turns the knob to light the stove.

Second surprise:

NO GAS.

New giggles dance to the sound of an early-morning stupor
that doesn't let up.

There's no hot water. . . there's no gas. . . don't panic. . . water,
yes. . . a glass of water would be good.

The water jug stares at her, impassive and very, very empty.
She resigns herself.

One must keep one's head on mornings like these, as when
dealing with capricious children.

The first decision of the day would have to be: a bath with cold
water upon her warm skin, or warm, sleepy skin under her
clothing?

Warm, sleepy skin wins.

Her stomach makes its presence felt like an ill-mannered imp,
and she thinks of the consequences that wolfing down a slice of
bread and marmalade would bring about.

To hell with the consequences! Thank God for our daily bread
(even if there is no marmalade).

She thinks about the time.

She thinks about what to wear.

She thinks she's gotten wrinkles on her soul.

She thinks.

Outside, the sun insensitively reminds her that she is by nature
a nocturnal creature. It hurts her eyes and seems to ask her:

"Remember last night's drinks, my dear, and the young
man with the big eyes?"

(She remembers the tequila better than the big eyes.)

Suddenly, as in a Warner Brothers' picture, we see a flash-
back in which a more girlish She, with her hair no less dishev-
eled, is observing the care with which her mother is putting on
her make-up, while saying to her, with the grace of a queen,

"As you know, precious, good girls do not drink tequila;
they drink *Shirley Temples*."

The scene ends and we return to Her face, her eyes now red
and blood-shot. She is in a dark, smoke-filled house, hippies
and long-hairs everywhere, seated in the lotus position, so still
they seem to be playing ivory statues, "One, two, three, and
freeze." She titters as She relights the green pipe containing a
green herb that turns her green eyes. . . red! (Here we have our
first chromatic error.)

"Good girls don't smoke and don't talk much either. They
eat like birds and never get home after ten o'clock at night.
Understand, my dear? Do you understand?" the mother queen
continues from her beautiful, perfumed throne.

And the little girl answers:

"But what about the instant soup, mother, and the wild-
goose chases trying to find work? And the trips to prison to try
to obtain information? Where do I stick all of that? Where do I
put it? Next to my teddy bears? Between my white sheets?"

"Where do I keep the neighborhood prostitutes, mama, where do I put my anguish? And where do I put the fear of not being enough, and the string of words that I could put in front of 'enough'?"

"Pretty enough, good enough, serious enough, tall, beautiful, strong, brave, or experienced enough.

"How do good girls live these days, between bellicose cries and conflicts, between a rock and a hard place, among lists of frustrated loves, lines of coke, and an occasional zinger to the conscience, among mocking clouds of smoke?"

Her mother looks at her for a long time:

"Oh, darling, don't ask silly questions!"

"And the threat of AIDS, mother, and multi-colored condoms, and the corner drunk, where, where do I put them? Where do I put the murdered child, mother, not the dead child, but the MURDERED one? Where do I hide all the dirty business while you explain to your coffee-klatsch that your daughter has taken to playing Lois Lane and being modern, when all I feel like is a failed Clark Kent?"

"Where do I keep the work stress, the death of emigrants, the woman who works at the *maquiladora*? They don't fit in with my Barbie dolls!"

"We live in a generation of instant soups and instant love affairs, that last no longer than four shots of booze, mother. We walk through life wearing gas masks, and trenches break open in our souls, and bombs in our bodies. It's a dog-eat-dog generation, 'mess with me and I'll kill you,' in which the compact disc replaced LPs like computers are replacing us, in which telephone calls now are from one answering machine to another, mother, and loneliness is absolute. Where we're fragmented, diluted, recycled, while those who call themselves prophets/defenders of ecology swarm through the streets foretelling the final disaster and the winning lottery number, and intellectual cliques judge you by the amount-of-sheets-of-paper-expended-and-amount-of-ink-spilled and they've already sold out to the shops and stationers, and Nestle's metes out culture with baby formula, and your clothing is handed out, mother, while one falls in love with the reticent, renegade

apostle, mother, and you hurl yourself into living a latex love-life by means of canned sex, mother.

Where we are alone.

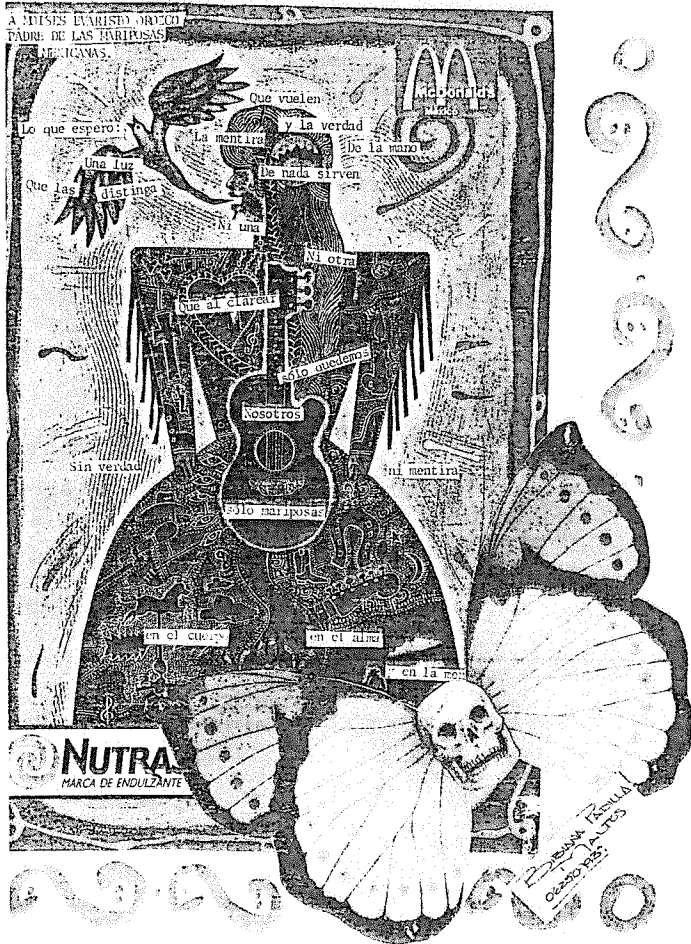
Eight o'clock. Morning reflection over.

It's time it's time it's time to go to work. Third surprise:
NO MONEY IN HER POCKET.

Of course!

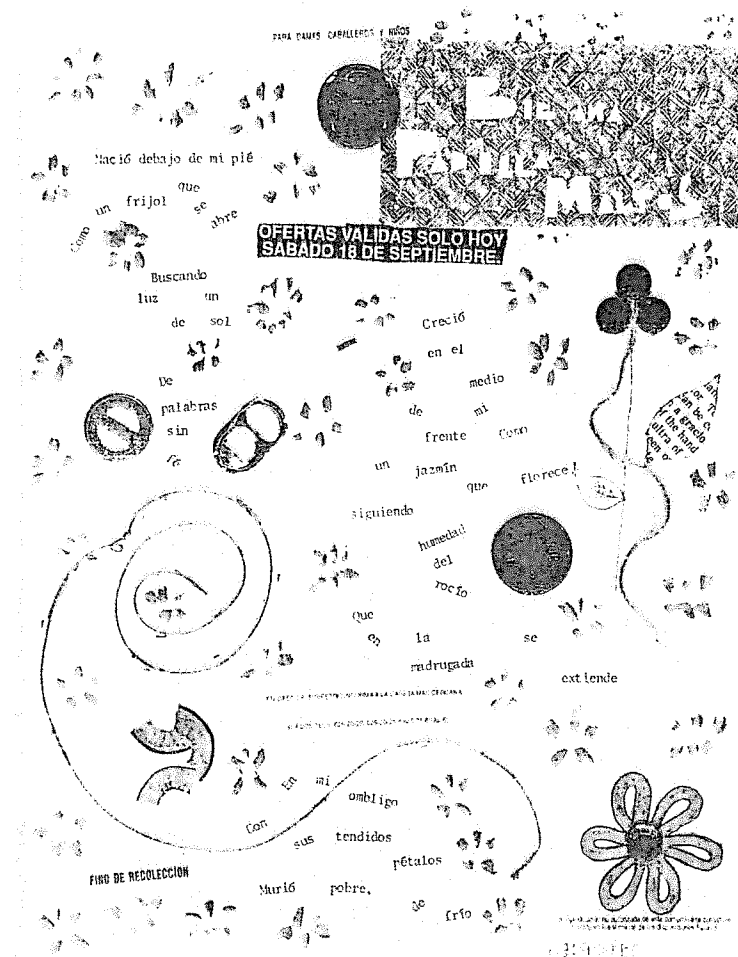
Off she goes, whistling a strange tune.

—translated by Patricia L. Irby



(mixed media)

Bibiana Padilla Maltos



(mixed media)

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