

HN

American Wandersong

For my parents' exile from their blood-warm rain of Cuba to Madrid's frozen drizzle pinging rooftops the February afternoon I was born. A tiny brown and wrinkled blessing counter to such poverty that my first crib was an open drawer cushioned with towels in an apartment shared by four families. Such as my mother told me for years, kindling my imagination still burning to understand that slipping into being when my longing to belong first began.

And continued: swaddled in the cloud of her arms above the clouds of the Atlantic to America, birthed again at forty-five days old as an immigrant, my newborn photo taken for my green card. Destined to live with two first languages, two countries, two selves, and in the space between them all.

My name is and isn't *Ricardo De Jesús Blanco-Valdés*—christened for the sunlit and sea-song past of my parents' island, carrying withered memories of their homeland like dry rose petals pressed in a book that someday I'd need to crack open, read into the middle of a story I'd need to reclaim, finish, and call my own.

My name is and isn't Richard, a translation I began to call myself by, yearning to write myself into my other story, my other role, my other fictional character as a straight white boy of color in an American drama I didn't quite understand, either.

Excerpted from *How to Love a Country: Poems by Richard Blanco* Copyright © 2019 by Richard Blanco Reprinted with permission from Beacon Press, Boston

For the terra-cotta roof and tattered lawn chair patio of the home that raised me in Miami, soothed by the mango tree shadows of our backyard. Their tangy-ripe scent stirring in with the incense of *comino and laurel* rising from Mamá's pots of *frijoles negros*, the taste of my birthright at dinner every night.

My father listening to 8-tracks of Cuban *danzones*, slumped in the family room sofa alone with a glass full of rum and empty eyes.

My *Abuelo's* front-porch stories of all we lost to *la revolución: our* farmhouse, *our* jasmine trees, *our* dog, Pancho. My *Abuela* steadying me down the driveway, insisting I learn how to ride my bike and be *el hombre* she knew I'd never be.

The papery curtains of my bedroom fluttering with the speechless moon that spoke to me about loneliness, distance, journey, echoed by the palm tree sways against my window rustling a lullaby every night while I mumbled my prayers in English, then Spanish: glory be to all the light and the shadow, the wonder and noise, the confusion and calm of my childhood—as *it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.*

For the half of me who never lived in Cuba, yet remembers it as if I was returning to its chartreuse fields and turquoise-laced coasts coloring my eyes again for the first time as the plane descends

toward the land of which I am a descendant. I step into a mirage of myself haunted by impossible memories of who I was and would be had my life been lived here.

The boy who hacks into the flesh of coconuts I never tasted, who reads time from the village clock in the square where I never played marbles with my cousins, who pedals through country roads raising dust that never raised me, who catches fireflies that I never chased, the neon green flashes that never dazzled my childhood here.

The son who slashes sugarcane I never harvested with my father, adores him as I never did for his careworn hands that never held mine, my hands around his waist riding his horse that I never rode to the dirt-floor home where I never grew up watching my mother stir pots of *arroz-con-pollo* in a kitchen where I never ate, and never listened to bedtime stories she never told me in a bed where I never dreamed.

The man who misses a life I never knew was mine to miss, claim as my own in Spanish, as *muy mío*: the conga beats of my tropical storms, ballad of my *palmeras*, balmy whispers of my Caribbean song. *Muy mío*: the iron-red soil of my flesh, sand of my white bones, pink hibiscus of my blood. *Muy mío*: the constellations I reconfigure into an astrology to read the past of who this half of me was, or never was. The future of who I will never be, or who will always be as an island within this island, *muy mío*.

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WATSON

To cast this rare world premiere, Adler reached out largely to GableStage veterans before a working script was finished. All said yes, and when they sat together in mid-October to read the play aloud, it was the first time they had seen the script.

Stephen G. Anthony, the only cast member to play a single role, is portraying Thomas Watson Sr. Iain Batchelor, a British actor who now lives in South Florida, makes his U.S. debut as Thomas J. Watson Jr., the son who took over IBM shortly before his fa-

ther's death in 1956. Margot Moreland plays Jeanette Watson, wife to Thomas Sr. and mother of Thomas Jr. Actors Peter Galman, Diana Garle, Peter Haig and Barry Tarallo play multiple roles.

During a recent conversation, Anthony was reluctant to speak about his still-in-process portrayal of Watson, saying, "When you're in the midst of something, you almost don't want to name it."

But he adds, "I'm really looking forward to hearing what people have to say about what they've experienced."

Grippando says of Anthony, "With Steve's ability to move from narrative to dialogue seamlessly, I'm awestruck by the craft."

For Moreland, whose character is caught between her husband and son, "Steve is just perfect as Watson. He's not only a commanding presence, but he also has heart. So you think, 'Do I like him? Don't I like him?'"

Though the play unfolds in a brisk, intermission-free 90 minutes, it follows Watson Sr.'s life from 1890 to 1952, which Batchelor sees as vital to understanding the character.

"It's important that it starts where it does," he says. "You see that he has to constantly change and evolve and grind in order to survive. I spend a lot of the play cross-examining him. He's right to be concerned with legacy, because it

could all come tumbling down."

Extensive research material — books, articles, biographies and autobiographies — has fed into the work Adler, the playwright and the actors are doing on "Watson."

But ultimately, everyone has to make Grippando's play work.

"All these different sources and perspectives make it hard when you're trying to stay true to the facts," the playwright says. "You have to distill what this person was really like."

"There is no one truth," Adler says. "There is this one's truth, and that one's truth."

The collaborative process in theater — so different



Courtesy of George Schiavone

Iain Batchelor as Thomas J. Watson Jr. is angrily confronted by Stephen G. Anthony as Thomas J. Watson Sr. in the GableStage world premiere of James Grippando's 'Watson.'

from Grippando's solitary process as a novelist — has worked well, in part because of his willingness to make changes large and

small.

"I haven't had this experience in a long time, where an editor digs in and makes me reevaluate scenes, lines, word choices," he says. "And I feed off the energy of these actors."

Adler adds that "there were several rewrites from the ground up. We'd have a couple of hours of conversation about why something wasn't working, then he'd send me a whole new script. It was only when we were willing to take a stand regarding Watson that we got a script that really propelled the play forward."

Adler realizes presenting an untested play involves risk, but say it's something he wishes he'd done more often through the years.

"When I got the last draft, I thought, 'This is what we've been trying to do for a year and a half.' I thought it was ready. I didn't want to have to wait until next season to do it," he says. "This is an unconventional play. It's very dense. If you tune out, you're lost. I'd liken it to [Michael Frayn's] 'Copenhagen.' It's very thought-provoking."

Says Galman, who plays Dehomag head Willy Heindinger and others, "James put a lot of meat on the table."

"In the best sense, people will leave with a lot of questions," Batchelor says. "History is a conversation that is ongoing."

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 With your help, we raised over \$104,000 at the 31st Annual Easterseals South Florida Festival of Chefs event to benefit our Culinary Arts High School, a vocational training program for students with autism and other disabilities. A special thank you to Goya Foods, our generous sponsors, Chef Chair Jose Mendin, chef & restaurant participants, vendors, guests and friends of Easterseals South Florida for making our event a true success!

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MIAMI Association of Realtors

MIAMI Realtors CEO Teresa King Kinney Awarded Highest Honor by the National Association of Realtors

MIAMI Association of Realtors (MIAMI) CEO Teresa King Kinney was awarded the highest honor and distinction for a Realtor association executive as the 2019 recipient of the National Association of Realtors (NAR) William R. Magel Award of Excellence. NAR President John Smaby presented the prestigious award to Kinney at the National Board of Directors Meeting during their annual conference held in San Francisco, California, today.

The William R. Magel Award of Excellence is presented annually to an individual who has truly excelled in his or her role as an association executive of a Realtor association. The most compelling candidates are those who are well-known within the AE community, with an extensive record of participation, mentorship and contributions that is consistent with the Award's qualifications.

In his presentation, National President John Smaby cited many of our accomplishments over the years and this truly is an award for our CEO and as Kinney said "for all our leaders, members and professionals in the MIAMI Association of Realtors."

Kinney has led the nation's largest local Realtor association for 26 years, playing an integral role in making Miami a top real estate market for both domestic and international investment. Kinney came to Miami from St. Joseph, Missouri, where she had been CEO for the Realtor association for many years. When Kinney began with MIAMI in August 1993, the board had just 5,000 members.

Over the past 26 years, Kinney would lead the association to unprecedented growth. Today, the MIAMI board has a total of 52,000 members in four counties (Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach and Martin).

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What: "Watson" by James Grippando

When: Nov. 23 through Dec. 22; 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays, 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays, (no Thanksgiving performance)

Where: GableStage at the Biltmore, 1200 Anastasia Ave., Coral Gables.

Cost: \$50-\$65 (students \$15 Thursdays)

More information:
305-445-1119;
gablestage.org