

Keller, Gary D.

The pioneering bilingual persona of Eduardo/Edward Rivera

Centro Journal, Vol. XIV, Núm. 1, 2002, pp. 127-139

The City University of New York

Latinoamericanistas

Disponible en: <http://redalyc.uaemex.mx/src/inicio/ArtPdfRed.jsp?iCve=37711290009>



Centro Journal

ISSN (Versión impresa): 1538-6279

centro-journal@hunter.cuny.edu

The City University of New York

Latinoamericanistas

The Pioneering Bilingual Persona of Eduardo/Edward Rivera

GARY D. KELLER

ABSTRACT

The literary life of Eduardo/Edward Rivera is covered from the 1960s through the publication in 1982 of *Family Installments*. Rivera's readings of other writers such as Lorca, Joyce, Hemingway, the authors of "*El Boom*" *latinoamericano*, Díaz Valcárcel, and El Huitlacoche are reviewed, as well as Rivera's innovative contributions to creative literature. Rivera's bilingualism is contrasted with that of Hemingway. The essay treats Rivera's professional life at The City College of New York up to and including the founding of *The Bilingual Review/La Revista Bilingüe* at that institution in 1973 and the publication of *Family Installments* nearly a decade later. The essay reviews highlights of the friendship and collaborations between Eduardo Rivera and Gary D. Keller during the period of the late 1960s through 1982. Finally, light is shed on how *Family Installments* grew into a book, and insight is offered on why Eduardo Rivera published little if any fiction after 1982.

Cover reprinted, by permission,
from Penguin Putnam, Inc.

"Understanding Tragedy, from the Word, 'Goat.' "

In our *palomilla* he went by the name, Eddie, and that is how I must refer to him on Easter 2002, thus keeping alive the bonds through intensely relived memories.

Eddie was bilingual. Eduardo/Edward Rivera was bilingual at full strength, with all that goes with it. He was this plenitude in his creative writing, in his professional life, and in his social and community constructs. At the core of his most deeply experienced identity, he was bilingual with all that goes with that ellipsis, including the redress of life's *imprevistos* and *malas partidas* which those of us who graduate into adulthood come to eventually realize full well.

I no longer remember when I first met Eddie Rivera nor the exact circumstances, but it was at Columbia University early on, some time after I had adjusted to the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

I enrolled as a graduate student in the summer of 1963 as a *mocoso* of 20 and continuously thereon through 1971 with a doctorate. At the portals of Columbia, barely in New York for a few months from Mexico, I experienced the huge trauma of November 1963: the murder of JFK. In response, I wrote bad, cathartic poetry, two years later or so fell deeply in love, twice, simultaneously, and did things that twenty-year-olds did in New York City in the '60s. Around that time, I met Eddie. We developed what Martin Buber would have called, if he had applied the term bilingually, a deeply productive I-thou/*t -yo* relationship. While Eddie earned an M.F.A. in creative writing from Columbia, I earned a Ph.D. in Hispanic literature and linguistics. In the mid-1960s, I remember that Eddie was not only urban but urbane, and he was so New York.

Eddie, urbane and sophisticated? That might sound counterintuitive to those who knew him because the singular persona he cultivated doesn't associate with those traits. Yet that's the way he impressed a guy who had been formed on the border and who had gone to a small college, the Universidad de las Américas, in Mexico City, where he either worked at his *pluriempleos* to pay for the tuition and the tacos or hung out with Korean war veterans taking advantage of their G.I. educational opportunities. Compared to Eddie in the mid-1960s, I was or felt myself a border *fayuquero*. The earliest thing that I remembered about Eddie was that he bought books, he treasured them, and he pondered their contents. Neither of us came from book-buying families or backgrounds, and while I was still one foot out of the wilderness, Eddie was urban and urbane. My experience was to come across books willy-nilly and yes, to treasure them, but not more than the huge collection of bottle caps that I had accumulated from age 11 in my *peripeteias* around border dumps. Books were often treasures that I had come upon without self-selection in random walks, like the two-volume Penguin copy of Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (*los hermanos Caramambazo*, ¿eh? Eddie) that I had found discarded among tin cans and lead batteries. This multifaceted nugget unearthed from the dump finally only last year fell into acid-paper flakes beyond all reasonable rehabilitation, *justo* as you, Eddie, like "Xavier F. Alegría. . .poetaster" was sent to meet the All Powerful, not refused, but taken *de un golpe*, "then and there." I learned much from you, Eddie. About selection, placement, and breadth. Eddie Rivera, who knew much about the various editions of Cervantes' *Don Quijote* and even the illustrations by such people as Gustave Doré.

Te suplico, remember that moment with me now, Eddie. Or I will remember it for both of us. Let us open together the book of Karamazov/*Caramambazo*, and relive our original, anxious glossing in the 1960s of the visitation of the Grand Inquisitor to the he/He who had descended to Earth and was cast into the cell:

“Thou didst promise them the bread of Heaven, but, I repeat again, can it compare with earthly bread in the eyes of the weak, ever sinful and ignoble race of man? . . . what is to become of the millions . . . who will not have the strength to forego the earthly bread for the sake of the heavenly? Or dost thou care only for the . . . great and strong . . . ? No, we care for the weak too.”

About the placement, sequencing, and ranking of the literary and artistic milestones of the life of the mind, and about dedication to both the mentorship of *los humildes de esta tierra*, Eddie, *t me ense aste un mundo*. About freedom and free will, about Christian faith and about doubt, about heavenly bread and earthly bread, we shared the conundrums.

To this day, I believe I have not quite met another U.S. Latino with the breadth of Eddie, at least of his/our *su/nuestro* generation. Among younger Latino scholars who have had the significant benefits of cultural evolution, breadth is not as rare a quality. By the late 1960s Eddie and I were the closest of I-thous/*t yos* and we partook of literary, cinematic, hallucinogenic, and to a lesser extent, due to our socioeconomic status, theatrical and visual New York City. In those mid- and late 1960s I recall going to Broadway with Eddie, seeing Richard Burton in *Hamlet*, as well as Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. Eddie, how I now wish as I unearth these lapidary moments that I could have had the wits to tell you how much your love of Shakespeare (not only Shakespeare but Christopher Marlow and Ben Jonson and all manners of Elizabethan achievement) rubbed off not only on me, but on the succeeding generation. On that little kid, Randito, the one in the baptism shot in this homenaje issue, Eddie, your tragedies and your tragedgies, your metaphors and your metonymies, have made a lasting mark.

In those years before the founding of *The Bilingual Review/La Revista Bilingüe*, while the journal and the press was glimmering and percolating in primal formation, Eddie and I were busy intellectually sharing. As we each in turn emerged in urbane New York, we worked out Hannah Arendt, who was coining the phrase “the banality of evil” in her report on Eichmann in Jerusalem. We worked on or worked out A.E. Hotchner's *Papa Hemingway*, Kurt Vonnegut's, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and Norman Mailer's *Armies of the Night*. Vonnegut was teaching at City College at the time that we both were there, and one of my students, Dyan Donnelly, an early contributor to *The Bilingual Review/La Revista Bilingüe* made a strong impression on him. Jane Fonda came to CCNY to speak against the Vietnam War. It was a poignant moment and I remember not a word of what she said, only how small and frail she looked in real life, in blue jeans and a pullover, not at all like the plenipotent sex goddess of the 1968 *Barbarella*, the opening scenes of which drove Eddie and me into Dionysian frenzy. And how when she was spotted, without sufficient escorts, a gaggle of CCNY undergraduates chased and cornered her like a cat and one Latino student planted a hugely aggressive smacker full on her mouth. Thank god no student or acquaintance of mine! *En la madre!*

Eddie, we saw *Zorba the Greek* and *Dr. Strangelove* together. Eddie, what about *Dr. Zhivago*? Did we double-date that one too? Or is this Dr./Dr. recollection *quiz, quiz, quiz* . . . a phantom memory that comes from reconstructing the past, a reordering for morphosyntactic pleasure? Certainly, Eddie, you and I had no inkling until decades later that there was a Hispanic connection to *Zorba*, in the form of the actor Anthony Oaxaca Quinn and his Latino heritage. That required a recuperation and

reconstruction of a heritage that had been marginalized or obscured over decades, scores, and centenaries of years.

Eddie, you and I worked out John Berryman's 77 *dream songs*, and then talked over his jumping off the bridge at the University of Minnesota (my wife's alma mater). And Randall Jarrell's *The Lost World* and then pondered his death in 1965. In 1972, you were there for Randall Keller's baptism. By then, Mao Tse Tsung's, *Quotations of Chairman Mao* were quoted to us frequently by radicalized CCNY students in our class, Sidney Poitier had appeared in *The Heat of the Night* and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. We saw those two flickers and others like *Z*, *Easy Rider*, and *Belle de Jour*, and we were laughing our heads off with Philip Roth *Portnoy's Complaint*, including the censored parts about Mayor John V. Lindsay's sexual escapades with the Monkey which somehow, like the *habilitados* NYC employees that we were, we had scurrilously obtained; was it your caring editor's doing, Ted Solotaroff who had created *New American Review*?

Clearly, we realized that the times they were a'changing, but with respect to Hispanic-focused literature, what Eddie Rivera and I discussed in the late 1960s and early 1970s was mostly *apartado* from Puerto Rican, Chicano, or other U.S. Latino literature. Most definitely we discussed García Lorca (yes, *Poeta en Nueva York*, or as Eddie liked to call it, *Nueva Yol*, but also the theater and of course, the remarkable "Seis poemas gallegos," that García Lorca penned). In addition to Lorca's urbanity, his *arranques* / *ricos*, Eddie and I were highly attracted to his multilingualism and multiculturalism, not only his ability to assume the persona of a *gitano macho* in *Poema del cante jondo* (1921) and *Romancero gitano* (1924-1927), (the author also displays a homosexual persona in other works) but also his ability to assume a *gallego-portugués* / *fa adé* in his spectacular *gallego* poems. There was William Carlos Williams, a writer whose Latino facets (his mother was Puerto Rican, his father, English) we appreciated as well, although his background was not particularly highlighted in the analysis and appreciation of the poetry. Like Lorca, who differed from Carlos Williams in most other respects, the latter also had the quality of multilingualism. Carlos Williams died in 1963, and his *Pictures from Brueghel* won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry that same year. Pablo Neruda won the Nobel prize for literature in 1971, and Eddie and I enjoyed his work immensely.

Eddie and I discussed Latin American literature. To my knowledge, the term, "El Boom" referring to Latin American literature had not been coined yet, but no matter. We in New York City lived it in the all together. Carlos Fuentes had published *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* in 1962 and *Cambio de piel* in 1967. Julio Cortázar weighed in with *Rayuela* in 1963 and *62: Modelo para armar* in 1968. Guillermo Cabrera Infante published *Tres tristes tigres* in 1967 and José Donoso published *El obseno p jaro de la noche* in 1970.

Mario Vargas Llosa, the man from Arequipa, published *La ciudad y los perros* in 1963; *La casa verde* in 1966; *Los cachorros* in 1967; in collaboration with Gabriel García Márquez, *La novela en América Latina*; *Di logo* in 1968; and with Julio Cortázar, *La literatura en la revolución y la revolución en la literatura* in 1970. The man from Aracataca, Gabriel García Márquez had published in 1961 (written in the late '50s) his *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* (translated into English by Jerome S. Bernstein, "Jerry," a wild and crazy CCNY colleague who was one of the *palomilla* and an early Bilingual Review/Press typesetter in his spare time). In 1962, appeared his *Los funerales de la Mam Grande* appeared and in 1967, the solitude heard round the world, *Cien años de soledad*, which Prof. Gregory Rabassa, active in the Columbia University

community, translated in 1970. The man from Aracataca created the world of Macondo, just as the man from Oxford, Mississippi, had created Yopknatawpha County. Beginning in 1973, with the publication of *Estampas del Valle y otras cosas*, the man from the Rio Grande/Río Bravo Valley, Rolando Hinojosa-Smith (later shortened to Rolando Hinojosa, unknown to us until the mid-1970s) created Belken County, Texas. Over a decade later, Eduardo/Edward from New York City by way of Orocovis was to publish a book about *El Barrio* of New York, founded on the magical clay of the world of Bautabarro, “somewhere in the *Cordillera*” close to where the Bauta River couples “with the Toro Negro [and] flows into the *Mar Caribe*.” In this *borinque* o home village, the inhabitants have never seen the sea. This book was published in 1982, the year Gabriel García Márquez won the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Ultimately, Eddie and I often talked about bilingual/multilingual literature. When our girlfriends (significant others in current parlance? *bueno, novias*) Mary Lindemann, who I married in 1967, and Sidney (I hope I’ve spelled your name right, dear heart) Diamond tired of our literary ruminations, Eddie and I would talk on feverishly through the night.

To us the two *monstruos de la naturaleza*, as Cervantes once called Lope de Vega, were James Joyce and Ernest Hemingway. Joyce’s creative combinations are amazing, but his expansion of multilingualism to the *nth* degree, is, of course, highly demanding of the reader. Eddie and I appreciated the multilingual achievements of Joyce, but our interests were in applying the creativity of bilingualism to inspire living, bilingual communities. We were interested in learning from and drawing from the active, energetic bilingualism of *boricua*, Chicano, and other U.S. Hispanic communities characterized by strong multilingual contact and interaction. Moreover, in our own writing we wanted **not** solely to recreate the bilingualism of communities. Mimesis was not our primary goal and probably is very rarely the goal of any creative writer, contrary to the assumptions of so many sociolinguists who have used literary texts as primary data for sociolinguistic analysis. While in some instances Eddie may have contented himself with a mere recapturing of typical bilingual speech or speech patterns, in many other passages he was engaged in expanding the envelope, creating a *sui generis* artistic language that was both understandable to an able bilingual/multicultural reader and appreciated by that reader as unique, singular, and inspiring. The goal of singularity while at the same time preserving comprehensibility on the part of working-class Puerto Rican and other readers was overriding for Eddie Rivera, part of whose magisterium included his affiliation as a faculty member of the Center for Worker Education of City College of New York. For this reason, Eddie could travel only so far in the wake of James Joyce, who had pushed the envelope to the point that his *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* were beyond the pale of the average reader and were the source not only of considerable income from his works of exegesis on the Irish writer’s texts, but also of enjoyable if rarefied graduate seminars by William York Tindall at Columbia University.

Ernest Hemingway; the importance of being Ernest was *otra cosa*, and much closer to *cosa nuestra*. Several aspects of Hemingway’s literary bilingualism amazed both Eddie and me. One feature in this writer notable for his minimalism and economy in style, was that Hemingway avoided if at all possible the typical, verbose, repetitive, inelegant bilingual style of many writers, who tend to express something first in the “strange” language and then translate it in the language in which the presumed reader is versed. Instead of this cumbersome strategy, Hemingway masterfully introduced

rodeos, contextual and connotative cues that gave the sense of what was occurring without incurring the full frontal assault of denotation. Hemingway was a master at these artful circumlocutions, and so was Rivera. Instead of deadening the artistic impact of bilingualism by doubling it upon itself, Rivera expanded the majesty and mystery of the creative channel, by offering hints, deep and small, that drew in the reader. To quote *Hamlet*: “by indirection find direction out.”

In addition to circumlocution and contextualizing the overt use of Spanish in his works, the most remarkable aspect of Hemingway’s bilingualism was the way that he evoked Spanish by means of a fluted, fashioned, and rendered English. With phrases like

the blond one with the rare name
thou art much woman
he went much with gypsies

Hemingway was able to create a manifest, surface, deviant English that evoked latent, underlying Spanish. Writers such as Eduardo Rivera, Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, and El Huitlacoche, however, because their presumed **readership** was bilingual, were able not only to use the techniques of Hemingway, but also to advance upon them to a certain degree, by fusing Spanish and English in novel ways, in a style that paralleled certain aspects of the language production of living bilingual communities. For the full-blown, ideal bilingual reader of Eduardo/Edward Rivera a robust recipe was concocted, a veritable fluid feast of double entendres and cross references. Here are some of the textual examples of Rivera’s creative literary bilingualism. These examples are taken from “*Antecedentes*,” first published in 1972 in *New American Review*.

“I could tell you stories, Santos,” she told me, “that would make the little hairs on your *fundillo* stand straight out.”

Papá Santos Malánguez was a poor hillbilly, a *j baro desgraciado*, and, said my father, who was his favorite, was the kindest man he ever knew.

Papá Santos would give her a concoction of boiled milk with ginger and some wild herb called “good grass,” and soothe her with words while she drank it.

Gigante was a thrifty *patr n*. He underpaid and overworked his *peones*, who quit on him as soon as they could find better pay.

Papi was one of those hard-up *j baros*. He looked five years younger than his actual age.

So he stuck fast to the burdens of a *viudo*. Except for celibacy. That would have been too much for a *puro macho*.

Hortensio was a machete wielder from the womb, just about; and it was tough *tetas* for any *j baro* who even looked like he was tossing *florechitas* at one of the sisters.

Rivera combines both English and Spanish directly, without explanation, circumlocution, compensation, or any other form of linguistic accommodation for the monolingual. “Tough *tetas*,” “tossing *floreccitas*,” “hard-up *j baros*,” and other examples directly combine colloquial Spanish and colloquial English in a way that is not easily accessible for either monolingual English or monolingual Spanish speakers. On the other hand, a “wild herb called ‘good grass’” is a Hemingway-type locution. English is used to stand for Spanish (surface “good grass” = subsurface “*yerba buena*”). Moreover, the locution “good grass” also plays with the connotation of marijuana in colloquial English, so that it functions as a double entendre in English as well as a rendering of subsurface Spanish.

In 1972, Emilio Díaz Valcárcel published his novela-album, *Figuraciones en el mes de marzo* (subsequently translated into English by the Bilingual Press), with its intensely macaronic speeches by the Puerto Rican poet:

¿quál siendo la rola de la poetría? Questiona halto difísil a reportal,
pero me adelando a sugestil que la labol del poheta eh la de reflectar
asquitaradamanti la realití de su mah profundo sel. No lo habeís
dicho ya crazymente el gran Hale? And quáleh su palabrah para la
hehtoria? Rememberlah, señoreh: Sel u no sel, that is el lío.

In 1974 I published a bilingual story, “The man who invented the automatic jumping bean,” which had a passage in it that Eddie and I discussed at some length in the making. It refers to two brothers in the language contact, shatter zone of the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez border. The following text is about these two brothers, as perceived by their bewildered father who was *puro mexicano* and not Mexican American:

He feared for his Mexico-Americanized sons, alloys of detinned beer
cans. Appreciable schizophrenes. Unable to speak a tongue of any
convention, they gabbed to each other, the younger and the older, in
a papiamento of street *caliche* and devious calques. A tongue only
Tex-Mexs, wetbacks, tirilones, pachucos and pochos could penetrate.

This “papiamento of street *caliche* and devious calques” (semantic loan transfers like “good grass” or “*estoy supuesto a ir*” recreating into Spanish “I am supposed to go”), a tongue that a new generation of English-Spanish speakers had carved out of multilingual America, was the basis for the literary creations of both Eddie Rivera and El Huitlacoche (Gary Keller) who were writing in tandem, consulting each other, and publishing like-minded writers who pioneered the bilingual medium of the late 1960s and early 1970s, including Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, Alurista, and Juan (Felipe) Herrera (the latter two authors appeared in the Volume II, January-August 1975 issue of *The Bilingual Review/La Revista Bilingüe*).

Iberian and Latin American literature notwithstanding, there were very slim pickings with respect to Nuyorican, Chicano, and other United States Latino literature in the 1960s and early 1970s. Nor was there much scholarship by and/or about women. That is why *vislumbra* *The Bilingual Review/La Revista Bilingüe*.

Quinto Sol, the Berkeley publisher had just begun publishing and . . . *y no se lo trag la tierra/And the earth did not part* by Tomás Rivera came out in 1971 and *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya was released in 1972. In 1961, a publisher with an instructive name for the time, Mainstream Publishers, had published Jesús Colón’s *A Puerto*

Rican in New York, and Other Sketches, and in 1971, a sociological book, with photographs, *Palante: Young Lords Party* was published. Nicholasa Mohr wrote *Nilda*, a novel of a young girl growing up in “Spanish Harlem” with pictures by the author, published by Harper and Row in 1973.

In 1973, an opportunity presented itself to obtain some seed funding for projects that would have community impact. About the same time, with my *flamante* new doctorate and with the blessing of Renée Waldinger, the chair of the Department of Romance Languages at the City College of New York, my collaborators and I had established a new master’s level graduate program in Hispanic linguistics, particularly devoted to United States Spanish. Our *palomilla* submitted a proposal to establish a journal, and were awarded enough money from the Schiff Funds to underwrite the first issue and part of the second. Thank you Schiff family! Without your funding source *The Bilingual Review/La Revista Bilingüe* would not have happened, at least not in 1973.

The original group of men and women, most but not all of whom were recognized on the masthead of the journal, included Flor María Blanco, a CCNY student from Central America; Diana Vélez, *neorriqueña*, then a CCNY student, later to be a graduate student at Columbia, and currently a professor at the University of Iowa; Karen S. Van Hooft, who would soon be the managing editor of the journal and subsequently the press as well; Gabriela Mora, a faculty colleague at City College, now at Rutgers; and Haydée Rivera, from New York University (may she rest in peace). Mary M. Keller, stole precious free time from Harcourt Brace Jovanovich and Isabel Tarán (now Livosky), from her academic *quehaceres* to oversee the production of the journal.



Picture taken in 1972 on the day of the baptism of Randall Keller. The four are among the founders of the Bilingual Review/Revista Bilingüe.

Left to right: Edward Rivera, Randolph Pope (padrino to Randall), Gary Keller (father), and Francisco “Pancho” Jiménez. Reprinted, by permission, from Gary Keller.

administrators, and educators from his home base at the University of Santa Clara; Eduardo/Edward Rivera; Gary D. Keller; and Randolph Pope, a native of Chile, who also earned his doctorate at Columbia and most recently was named Commonwealth Professor of Spanish at the University of Virginia. *Y el bebé, el Randito*.

Nicanor Parra was part of the group, although he later fell out of favor when he returned to Chile after it had come under the control of Pinochet. At the time, he was with us in New York City with his young wife and infant child, doing agit-prop on behalf of Salvador Allende (whose regime did not fall until September 11, 1973, considerably after the first issue of the journal had been sent to Valencia, Spain, for

The original group also included colleagues Eugenio Chang-Rodríguez, Jerry Bernstein, José Luis Martín, Philip Silver, Irwin Stern, and Elliot Glass from various New York City campuses. Hernán La Fontaine represented the public school sector. The original group included especially *los cuatro jinetes del apocalipsis*, those seen in the photograph included in this *homenaje* to Eddie Rivera. These were Francisco “Pancho” Jiménez, a doctoral student at Columbia whose work was featured in the original *El Espejo*, the magazine of Quinto Sol, and who has gone on to do wonderful things as a writer, scholar, senior

production). He produced a number of *artefactos* for the journal, including the following which presaged both the code-switching of bilingual communities and the work of Eddie Rivera and other bilingual creative writers.

One of the responses to Eddie's short story in the inaugural issue of *The Bilingual Review/La Revista Bilingüe* was a missive from a professorial nun at a college in the Midwest. She had torn out the promo with "Caesar and the Brutuses: a Tragedy," on it, encircled the word, "tragedy," and inserted the comment "Indeed!"

This was not the Internet age, or even the age of the fax. This was a time of mimesis and mimeography, days of wine and whiteout. Nevertheless, I took the time to compose an awesomely sensitive explanation that "tragedy" was there by conscious choice, and was an integral part of the text, as was "the Brutuses," "Dandy's *Inferno*," "Holy Roman Umpire," and "I am *absolutelymente* sure of it." Dear Sister ShaNaNa, I am *absolutelymente* sure that we have faithfully transcribed each and every one of Eduardo Rivera's artistic selections of spelling and diction, and that each and every one of these choices by Mr. Rivera was the product of careful consideration for the purpose of furthering his literary art. There was no response from Professor Sister ShaNaNa, and so the stone wall of sisterly silence still leaves the issue unresolved, albeit with considerable existential angst.



Fatal Flaw

In Eddie's "Caesar and the Brutuses," Bro'Leary is confronted by Sudano, who poses the following antinomy to the good brother Christian. Supposing the President of the United States slips on a banana peel and breaks his ass, is that a tragedy? Bro' becomes agitated and tells Sudano to watch his language. Sudano the pest persists. "I mean his neck, Brother. Sorry. Suppose his Holiness the Pope slips on a banana." Of course not, Bro' responds. You have to have a fatal flaw. In order to have a tragedy you need a fatal flaw. But Sudano is really into it. "Not even if the Pope gets paralyzed for life, Brother? I meant, that's a flaw, ain't it?" Brother O'Leary is affronted by Sudano's bad grammar. It's ain't that bothers the brother Christian. He calls him on ain't!

Eddie, it is *domingo de gloria!* And you were so precise at the core. That eye that discerned it all. That hand that dared to write about itself, and because it dared, took itself sternly to task. The eye that saw so much, it saw through itself and weakened its own will. I won't dishonor you now with one of those choice mythological launches. Remember that group that came to Columbia for the funerary perorations? *Verbo y espiga* they named themselves. They assembled at the Casa Hispánica freshly scrubbed and Sunday dressed to hear a rogue like Camilo José Cela boost a dubious soul like Gregorio Marañón, while he kept a choice *chorizo asturiano* in his coat pocket as insurance, a sort of indemnification to feed himself surreptitiously at the insidious reception that was to follow. *Cursiler as andantes!*

Because Eddie and I in the 1960s visited the visitation of the Grand Inquisitor to the he/He who had descended and was cast into the cell as it is recounted in the book of Karamazov. Because we then and there spurned the white bread that the Inquisitor offered and instead of earthly white bread, we chose freedom instead in

the form of *le mot juste* and all the consequences that go with *le mot juste*, for that reason I must make an honest accounting.

The *pueta* (not *poeta*, we refused that designation), the *pueta* in us railed at the way they so badly treated, with *gloria deshumanizadora*, Pablo Neruda and Emiliano Zapata and

alzando los cojones de Martí
como de cocos los tenía
el pobre pueta
de lo apóstol que era.

You are too frail and *de carne viva* to me as I am frail to myself on this *domingo de gloria*, to do violence to you in the glorifying way. So I will make an honest accounting of the fatal flaw of Eddie Rivera, the all too human imperfections that are what humanize us.

There are these moments of revelation, not the artistic epiphanies, but apposite and opposite, the ice water rushes that freeze the soul and the spirit. That moment of knotted, icy strangeness, when you were off somewhere celebrating and Sidney and I got to talking about your contract and your advance. And I look now at page 88 of the inaugural issue of the journal and it comes back to me again with this icy feeling of unknowability.

Eduardo Rivera has published stories and articles in *New American Review*, *New York* magazine, *The New York Times* and other publications. He is currently working on a book to be published by Simon and Schuster.

It is late at night, late, the hour of Goya's *Caprichos*, and Sidney tells me quietly, in a resigned and terministic way, "Eddie has put the advance for the novel that Ted Solotoff gave him in a separate bank account."

"I don't understand. Why?"

"He's convinced he will never finish the book!"

I feel winded. It's like being twelve again and thinking about God, the beginning of the universe, and an uncaused causer and finally, as I did when I was twelve, I simply foggedaboutit and turn to other things. But I never forget about it. I just submerge it. I never tell Eddie about this and not soon after Sidney leaves Eddie, or Eddie jilts Sidney or Sidney jilts Eddie because she needs to turn to her doctoral dissertation and move on with her career. But it's Eddie. At the acme, at the cusp of what he so earnestly Hemingway wants, recognition by commercial New York publishing, and he has it in his hands, he is utterly inconsolable.

Eddie stops writing. Fwop, just like that. *Como la ca a que se machet*. Does a cane of sugar fall in a *ca averal* if there is no one to *presenciarlo*? Eddie is inconsolable. Sometimes he calls me at the hour of Goya's *Caprichos*, and he is obscure and inebriated. Sometimes I meet him at some designated spot on the West Side, a bookstore, the West Side Café, the Café Ideal just below 110th and Broadway, the Thalia. He's carrying a can of Coca Cola in a brown bag that's four-fifths filled with Bacardi, or if he's in a "festive" mood, Ron Barrilito.

Around that time he confronts Alfred Kazin at a public lecture. And Kazin certainly deserves it, but Eddie is tipsy. Eddie, who is so precise, who knows where the skeletons are hidden, especially his own skeletons, confronts Kazin who in such and such a text has written that Puerto Rico is an "Island without Culture." It's at

some high-falutin kind of forum like the 92nd Street Y, filled with mainstream inky-dinky-lectuals and gradual students. For all I know Eddie is the only Puerto Rican in the crowd. Eddie goes on, citing chapter and verse. And Kazin is disconcerted and unprepared and the 'lectuals are restless because they could care less about some Puerto Rican patzer, they've come to praise Alfred not bury him, and celebrate *On Native Grounds* and *Bright Book of Life*.

Why did you say that Kazin? What's it all about, Alfie?

Kazin responds that this is a text that is best forgotten.

Best forgotten. Eddie is not at the top of his game. That night and other nights he has a double can of Coca Cola. A triple. Sometimes he calls in the middle of the night from a pay phone. It is the hour of the *Capricho*. I take him home with me and put him on the couch. Randito is in his crib. Eddie is on the couch. I empty the can of Coca Cola. Or I drink what's left. It goes down hard. There's so little cola.

Eddie is on the telephone. He's hurt. He's all banged up. I get to him and he's slumped in the telephone booth. Bloody. "They took my bike."

"Where?"

"Down there on Riverside Park."

"What the hell were you doing on Riverside Park in the middle of the night, Eddie? Are you a goddamn *pendejo loco* with a death wish?"

Eddie laughs. "They were god-damned Puerto Ricans too. I got one of them really good."

"Look at you Eddie. What the fuck are you doing? Fighting with kids? You could be cut to shreds."

But Eddie can't talk anymore. He's really sick now, and he vomits on his shoes. I help him out of the telephone booth and let him disgorge from the sidewalk into the gutter. "C'mon, let's go to my place and check you out in some light."

"No, *pana*. I can't go to your place. I'll scare Mary and the *nene*."

"I think we should go to the hospital. Your chest hurts doesn't it?"

"It's just a bruised rib. I'm sure it isn't much."

I take him back to his place, clean him up, and put him to bed and I sleep on his couch. In the morning he looks like a patch of huckleberries. He jokes with his CCNY students about having fallen off his bike in Riverside Park and its all *puro macho* and *puro pedo*. The next week he gets into a fight with a waiter at one of those classy West Side cafés that Woody Allen will make famous for its intellectual attributes. Either one of those artsy-fartsy places or one of those Cuban Chinese restaurants on the upper west side. Or both. I can't remember.

Eddie recovers. He finds another girl friend. I can't remember her name any more but she shares the picture with Eddie around the ides of March 1973 in Bear Mountain Park that is reproduced in this issue. I've cropped her out of the photo, because I can't remember her name and she quickly became extraneous.

Eddie goes down hill again. No girlfriend and no book. He's become adjusted to his labyrinth of solitude. I leave New York City for good in 1979 to become a graduate dean at Eastern Michigan University. Slowly, we are growing apart. I've got three sons now. Things happen. Eddie doesn't write much. Not even letters. He doesn't drink much either. He's o.k. He's adjusted to his solitude. I imagine that he has long returned the money to Ted Solotaroff. The decade comes to an end, and in 1980, our journal, which now also publishes books of both scholarship and creative literature, turns to a new project, what was to be a ground-breaking anthology, featuring a host of writers who are already on their way to making it big in the literary world, or will be soon. Authors the likes of Rudy Anaya, Nash Candelaria,

María Herrera-Sobek, Rolando Hinojosa, Julio Marzán, Leroy Quintana, Tito (Alberto) Ríos, Leo Romero, Carmen Valle, Ed Vega, and Alma Villanueva.

Francisco “Pancho” Jiménez and I edit and publish this anthology, *Hispanics in the United States: An Anthology of Creative Literature*. Eddie contributes a wonderful narrative, “Discipline,” that deals with the seventh grader Pericles Contreras and his problems with Brother Lomasney, and Malánguez, as usual, in the vulgarian middle. Eddie was back in the writing saddle in accordance with the law of “Your own kind,” as Malánguez in the middle put it in “Caesar and the Bruteses.” No more Simon and Schuster. No more promise of a book. The contributors notes for the special issue reads: “Eduardo Rivera has published stories and articles in *New American Review*, *New York* magazine, *University Review*, *The New York Times*, and other publications. Two of his stories have previously appeared in *The Bilingual Review/La Revista Bilingüe*.”

It’s all good. Eddie Rivera has graduated backward, out of Miserere Nobis, and back into Misericordia, where hell is no worse than a malaprop, Bro’Leary’s place names for lubbers, fat blue whales, sea cows, and “Dandy’s *Inferno*.” *Absolutelymente*.

Then in 1981, I get a call from Maria Guarnacelli, editor at William Morrow and Company. She is in love with Eddie’s work. She is committed to it. Will I help? Will I give them permission to publish it (for free)? It is so hard to publish a work by a minority writer in the mainstream, commercial publishing world. And a Puerto Rican no less! Of course I will work with her. Of course I will give them permission to publish the stories (for free). Whatever Eddie wants.

What does Eddie want? A strong-willed committed woman, I think. Maria—I just met a girl named Maria—puts it together and in 1982 the book with no name, rather like García Lorca’s *Sonetos del amor oscuro*, appears with a name, a beginning, and end, book covers, and best of all, blurbs on the book covers! “This book is alive with fresh-and-blood real people. . .an intense, living drama of the Puerto Rican diaspora.” Geraldo Rivera, good for you. Geraldo who has made it big, who no longer has to go by the name of Gerry Rivers (this according to Julio Marzán—to me it is all hearsay, but howling hearsay, the kind of bilingual perfection and “devious calque” that puts Eddie, after all, G. Rivera’s *tocayo* and me into belly laughs).

Maria has done it. Let’s hear it for Maria. This book has seen the light of day. It makes quite a splash in its niche. What Eddie had conceived as essentially fiction is now sold as “Memories,” but no matter, it is a reality. An actuality.

But, I don’t know that Eddie published another piece of fiction after that 1982 launch. Tonight twenty years since the book’s publication, on *domingo de gloria!* at the hora de Goya’s *Caprichos*, *V game Dios!* Don’t ask me why. I don’t know. I can’t answer.

Eddie, why didn’t I ask you about the cryogenic revelation that Sidney made to me? Ask is not the right word. Confront. Why didn’t I confront your *acomplejado*, urbane *j baro* ass? Why did you vault the money and with it the book? What was it Eddie? You, who emerged bilingual, fully formed, *avant la lettre*, like Athena from the head of Zeus? You were so advanced, Eddie.

I’m looking for an answer that I’ve been looking now for one score of years. I browse through Nicanor Parra’s *artefactos* in that inaugural issue of 1974 which I haven’t opened in a decade. In it is one called. “Far West”

CORRIAMOS A TAL VELOCIDAD
PERSEGUIDOS POR LOS PIELES ROJAS
QUE LAS RUEDAS DE NUESTRA DILIGENCIA
COMENZARON A GIRAR EN SENTIDO CONTRARIO

I look at the epigraphs to *Family Installments*. One is from Genesis 47: 29-32. “But I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their buryingplace.”

The other is from the *meistersinger* of multilingualism, James Joyce. From *Ulysses*. “Weary? He rests. He has travelled.” James Joyce, who came from an island off an island. Eddie Rivera, who was born in Orocovis, an internal island where the villagers did not know the sea on an island in a stream of islands. Eddie Rivera, who traveled to the island of Manhattan, to a new heart of darkness.

