

CLAUDINA DOMINGO
Sin destino fijo/No set destination

TRANSLATED BY RYAN GREENE

Translator's note:

Sin destino fijo/No set destination is one of the final poems in Claudina Domingo's *Tránsito/Transit*, an award-winning collection that presents a many-mouthed, poly-silhouetted portrait of Mexico City. If *Sin destino fijo/No set destination* were a lock, then line 4 of Mexico City's metro system would be the key. The poem traces the narrator's eye and ear as she travels the line from one end to the other and back again. It is both a personal and cartographic poem that invites the reader to get on the metro and take the same ride. When I visited Domingo in February 2017, that's exactly what I did. On one of my last mornings in the city, I performed the ride that Domingo catalogued, and I created an "experiential translation" to accompany my traditional translation of the poem. Later, I layered an audio version of this experiential translation over sounds I recorded while riding line 4 with Domingo earlier that same week¹. Sometimes the page doesn't feel like enough.

¹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zYs2UXV0z8T471kUY61DQJrOwLF-ITVp/view?usp=drivesdk>

No set destination

...(my nerves are tense like cables)
between the no city and the yes city...

EVGUENI EVTUSHENKO

(Santa Anita) curving tracks (shortcuts) wicked intentions coming closer or growing more distant tracks (at last) I hope they take me away never to return a single sense (surrender) a sinister truth “there’s no such thing” (the angel wants to say) but he stops (my heart hurls a fistful of stones at him) almost like a pick-up full of produce bearing down on a boy and his ball

(Jamaica) above (beyond my frailties) it teaches me another name “you need to start by spelling out” virgins (neo-rococo altarpieces) wedding ribbons hanging from facades (and from here on) toys for one-armed dolls

(Fray Servando) the bridges will crumble earlier than expected (upon their obligatory spine) bustle of coffins (flowers) a hobby-horse moving through the crowd (its head of rags) a promise hunter’s trophy it’s not hot anymore (november is an airborne month) held up (on rails) wrapped in orange

(Candelaria) (“I’m gonna mug you”) a dead elephant (the legislative palace) behind and below (robbed by memory) yellowing photos (fingernails and locks of hair in a box) the neighborhood that was always a muddy quagmire Lecumberri (condemned for its name) “one is closer to God in prison” dusty blue gloomy

gray itinerant black (sentinel) sky (to the west) ravaged hacienda
(my girl) knows I enjoy her imminent green poetry (branches
oozing from the rock) roots romping between pockmarked columns

(Morelos) advertises candy shops (bubblegum smell could decipher
infancy) “a coin for a taco” (cajeta popsicles) a little goat
leaps over a nut stand (pricked triceps) insertions into paradise
from purgatory (self-mortifying fakir) “I didn’t come here to
steal” necessity evolves over the bits of glass tinkling bells
(nearest to the illusion) a church (attempts) a vain assault on the
coppery sky (blue window sills)

(Canal del Norte) playing basketball (before nightfall) in the
empire of asbestos brick kingdoms antennas tanks of gas (on the
rooftops) (the consecration of a city is the denial of difference)
“the consecration of my city is its illumination” (half a bicycle
skeleton) a joyful golden dog cuts across a bird’s shadow the
sun blinds (hiding something in its light) “I’m going to melt into
sorrow” (I say) as a puddle of meekness swells up into my throat
Tlatelolco (from here) its defeat is imperceptible

(Consulado) “el negrito coal yard” a forest for a heart (con-
sider the metaphor) (airborne) enthusiast in its resins “(I
couldn’t resist) its way of growing from amber to mortuary blue
was so charming” a forest for a heart (and hands drawn to the
woodcutter’s calling)

(Bondoquito) windows (reflecting other windows) (commanders of
dreams) an abandoned studio (the city served on a pewter tray)
the sun hurls its last brick through some toothless hills

(Talisman) Crown canning help yourself to the city in disposable packaging milk cheese (¿maybe the virgins' yeast infections?) the fans carousel around under a cardboard sky (amid the ruins of other factories) the dogs identify what's edible there were trains (other tracks) boys watching through the window as a city dissolved into wastelands

(Martin Carrera) ending up in such a forbidding place (godless hell-less) pure factory putrefaction

(I'll say) "it's been a while" (then it also showed me its crystal treasure) (I'd said) "my fate will hinge on what I decide today" with a damned innocence I braced an evening in these parts (a city knows it) (it always offers me) the same twilight over these tracks

(to return) so to speak from here (so far away) the south (its greenery and magmatic canopies shut down) but to return is a dazzling word (and a soothing notion) (Talisman)

(the condemned) need not cry there's still fire after the twilight enough to light a cigarette (if you believe the Phoenix will return from the ashes) (Bondoquito)

"there's always someone who brings you to your knees" and a city that lifts you up above the filth (after all) a city must be more than a cliff (Consulado)

he dreams paint-thinner dreams (I) poetic deliriums "filtered over ten meters of charcoal" death chases us points at us with its index finger stumbles over other corpses "a city's not worth anything if it doesn't cause mental illness insanity fearlessness" (Canal del Norte)

there's no petrification (solitude is a hard-working hive) (outside) the
city gulps down its final shot of light (inside) other sweats knuckle
down to work under its shirts (Morelos)

(beyond blame) a city lights up its precarious neon faith
(Candelaria)

(for three stations now a helicopter's been making its rounds)
circles over the perfect prison schedules lover anguish food ¿rest?
(Fray Servando) ¿why run away? ¿where to? it's not even clear
that there's anything more than nostalgia (beyond the smog)

Sin destino fijo

...(mis nervios están tensos como cables)
entre la ciudad no y la ciudad sí...
EVGUENI EVTUSHENKO

(Santa Anita) vías que se doblan (vericuetos) aviesas intenciones
se acercan o se alejan vías (finalmente) ojalá me llevaran para
no regresar un sólo sentido (la claudicación) una ver-
dad siniestra “ninguna lo es” (quiere decir el ángel) pero se
detiene (mi corazón le avienta un puñado de piedras) casi como
una camioneta llena de hortalizas sobre un niño y su pelota

(Jamaica) arriba (por encima de mis debilidades) me enseña
otro nombre “debes empezar por deletrear” vírgenes (retablos
neorococó) lazos nupciales para las fachadas de las casas (desde
aquí) juguetes para muñecas mancas

(Fray Servando) los puentes sucumbirán antes de lo previsto
(sobre su espalda obligatoria) ajetreo de cajas (flores) un ca-
ballito de palo entre el gentío (su cabeza de trapo) el trofeo de
un cazador de promesas ya no hace calor (noviembre es un mes
aéreo) elevado (sobre rieles) encapsulado en naranja

(Candelaria) (“te voy a chinear”) un elefante muerto (el
palacio legislativo) detrás y debajo (desvalijadas por la memoria)
fotos amarillentas (uñas y cabello en una caja) el barrio que
siempre fue tierra lodazal mugre Lecumberri (condenada por
su nombre) “en la cárcel se está más cerca de Dios” azul

polvoriento gris apesadumbrado negro itinerante (centinela) el cielo
(hacia el oeste) hacienda arrasada (mi muchacha) sabe que me
gusta su inminente poesía verde (ramas que supura la roca)
raíces que se regodean entre columnas cacarizas

(Morelos) anuncia dulcerías (el olor a chicle descifrá la
infancia) “una moneda para un taco” (paletas de cajeta) una
cabra pequeña salta un puesto de nueces (tríceps piqueteados)
inserciones al paraíso desde el purgatorio (faquir) “no vengo
a robar” la necesidad evoluciona sobre los vidrios cascabeles
(lo más cercano a la ilusión) una iglesia (intenta) vano asalto al
cielo cobrizo (alféizares azules)

(Canal del Norte) jugar basquetbol (antes de que anochezca) en
el imperio del asbesto reinos de ladrillo antenas tanques de
gas (en las azoteas) (la consagración de una ciudad es negar la
diferencia) “la consagración de mi ciudad es alumbrarla” (me-
dio esqueleto de bicicleta) un perro amarillo y contento cruza una
sombra de pájaro el sol ciega (oculta algo entre la luz) “me
voy a fundir en la tristeza” (digo) mientras un charco de mansedum-
bre se me sube al cuello Tlatelolco (desde aquí) su derrota es
imperceptible

(Consulado) “carbonería el negrito” un bosque por corazón
(considerar la metáfora) (aéreo) entusiasta en sus resinas (no
pude negarme) era tan encantadora su forma de crecer del ámbar al
azul mortuorio un bosque por corazón (y vocación de leñador
en las manos)

(Bondoquito) ventanas (reflejan otras ventanas) (comendadoras de sueños) un estudio abandonado (la ciudad servida en bandeja de peltre) el sol lanza su último ladrido tras unos cerros desdentados

(Talismán) envases crown sírvase la ciudad en desechables
leche quesos (¿acaso la candidiasis de las vírgenes?) los ventiladores juegan al carrusel bajo un cielo de cartón (entre las ruinas de otras fábricas) los perros reconocen comestibles hubo trenes (otras vías) muchachos que miraban tras la ventana como se deslía una ciudad en páramo

(Martín Carrera) venir a dar a un lugar tan inhóspito (sin dios sin infierno) pura podredumbre de fábrica

(diré) “ha pasado mucho tiempo” (también entonces me enseñó su tesoro de cristal) (entonces dije) “de lo que decida hoy dependerá mi destino” con ingenuidad maldita apuntalé una tarde en el territorio (una ciudad lo sabe) (me ofrece siempre) el mismo atardecer sobre estas vías

(regresar) es un decir desde aquí (tan lejos) el sur (clausurados su verdor y sus doseles de lava) pero regresar es una deslumbrante palabra (y una noción reconfortante) (Talismán)

no deben llorar (los condenados) tras el crepúsculo aún queda lumbré la suficiente como para prender un cigarrillo (si se cree que de las cenizas regresará el Fénix) (Bondoquito)

“siempre hay alguien que te pone de rodillas” y una ciudad que te eleva sobre la inmundicia (después de todo) una ciudad debe ser más que un despeñadero (Consulado)

él sueña sueños de tiner (yo) delirios de poesía “filtrados sobre diez metros de carbón” la muerte nos busca nos apunta con el dedo indicado se tropieza con otros cuerpos “una ciudad no vale nada si no produce enfermedad mental locura arrojo” (Canal del Norte)

no existe la petrificación (la soledad es una laboriosa colmena) (afuera) la ciudad bebe su último trago de luz (adentro) otros sudores se esmeran en sus camisas (Morelos)

(más allá de la culpa) una ciudad enciende su precaria fe de neón (Candelaria)

(un helicóptero lleva tres estaciones haciendo la ronda) círculos sobre la prisión perfecta horarios amante angustia comida ¿reposo? (Fray Servando) ¿por qué huir? ¿a dónde? ni siquiera es seguro que haya algo más que nostalgia (más allá del esmog)

no.set.destination
[[for claudina]]

(jamaica)
rooftop twirl
rows of it
water tanks
skyscrapers in the distance
scaffolds // twin engines
climbing // falling

(santa anita)
past the last stop
friction creak and brakes exhaling
reverse
new tracks to take you places

(jamaica)
enters texting
crisp plastic crack of water bottle
purple flowers again
but faster
again the twirling
again the steel turned skyward

(fray servando)

two-fold

closure

on-track

headphone cords lacing past collars

under shirts

streets lacing under bridges

perpendicular rejected in favor of /|_

(candelaria)

mop followed by blue shoes

treading forward

church bells silent this time of day

corrugated roofs waiting for wind or rain to give them voice

for now

tongueless

(morelos)

zipper hangs from sleeve

from coat

from bag

a shoe painted on a shirt

cranes held hostage

boxed in by dust and concrete

(canal del norte)
trust in engineers
antennas upturned
wide-eared for invisible shrieks
something for sale on every axis

(consulado)
shock of light through gray sky
filtered|filtering
a secret hotel shouts at the top of its lungs
red tall and hungry

(bondoquito)
voices loosened from fixed bodies
coming from anywhere ~: everywhere
something to do with the angles
or saturation

(talismán)
one phone in one hand
another in another
mountains come closer and trees
elbow up against houses
buses parked like dogs

getting to know each other
nose to tail

(martín carrera)
concrete hulls would bulge if physics allowed
clinic and tire shop
schoolyard and bus terminal
halted limp home
into shadow
at last

(martín carrera)
a couple others wait for the switch
a plastic wrapped book and teeth flirting with fingernails
as always “” “” screenglow mesmerizes
a gentle cough
another mop
(black shoes not blue)
growl of mechanized air in transit

(talismán)
honking
dopplerized
the hills once more
rebarred and distant
sun up against helmet leaves face in shadow

(bondojito)
two pigtailed
laminated ID
cleargreen salve
orange-wrapped metal
in orbit

(consulado)
shoes with soft scuffs
furniture stores
potted plants on rooftops
shrubs sprouting from brick

(canal del norte)
mouth hides behind hair
reclusive
sun through billboard shows backlit life all smiles—no sleepless nights

(morelos)
a neck that looks like my father's
plastic twine stringing cardboard shut
a park with stained benches
populated □□□□□□□□ ultraviolet

(candelaria)

clenched fist and laundry out to dry
elbows touching periodically
sometimes just the hair on the back of arms in contact
pink shoelaces gray pants orange shirt
three lives contracted

(fray servando)

spoon emptying into black hole
mouth
lips
tongue
teeth
gums
yogurt
music louder than expected

(jamaica)

cactus bits despined and bagged
two bracelets on two left wrists
a jolt brings hands up in search of something
nothing left
but air
and plastic