Uranoán Noel
Ballade of a Boy

He grew up on an island that was torn
From pages of an in-flight magazine,
The local cynics said he had been born
Before authorities could intervene;
In fact, the cops concluded he was clean
And finally agreed to let him go.
The next two decades he would spend unseen,
Attempting to forget and to forego.

His mother dressed him early on in scorn,
His father went for liver failure green,
I do not mean to make him sound forlorn,
In many ways he was a normal teen:
He’d oversleep, make trouble, and careen
From job to job—McD’s to Texaco
To Mexico and back through Abilene!
Could I have guessed how he would end up? No.

All I know is that he learned to mourn,
Looking at once despondent and serene,
If every human life were shot as porn
His would be the scrapped seduction scene.
I saw him one last time by the porch screen.
He did not speak, but seemed to wave hello.
It was as if his eyes were trying to glean
A shuffle in the stillness, an echo.

Don’t ask me what it’s all supposed to mean,
That last good-bye was many years ago
And so much else has happened in between.
Perhaps the in-between is all we know.

Kool Logic

The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism; Frederic Jameson

1
I hope this finds you in good health
(Or at least gainfully employed).
We’re here to discuss the hologram-self
In the era of the void.

Some say modern man is hollow,
Others say it’s a condition
Called “postmodern.” Do you follow?
Could this use some exposition?

2
O.K. See the common graves
Rotting in the ancient cities?
The fast food? The porous borders?
The ambiguous sexualities?

The debt-bludgeoned ethnicities?
The wars of chemical roses?
Cash flows from Utopian rivers
And the market never closes!

“This is the kool logic
Of late capitalism.”

3
In the Prozac marketplaces
People hoard new modes of leisure;
Love has been deregulated:
Plastic breasts! Prosthetics! Seizures!

In the suburbs neighbors mourn
The death drive of their libidos,
Late summers full of soft porn,
Stolen Wonder Bras, torn Speedos.

“This is the kool logic
Of late capitalism.”
You can consume what you please:
From work music to new age;
Ricky Martin and John Cage
Are touring the Basque Pyrenees;

You can sing your songs of peace
(Pop! Punk! Folk! Tribal! Assorted!)
But the violence will not cease,
Hate's fetus can't be aborted!

“This is the kool logic
Of late capitalism.”

Macrobiotic-cybernetic-
Fiber-optic folderol!
Neo-gothic supermodels!
Satellites and virtual malls!

Vegan power lunch grand slams!
Word elites! Money-go-rounds!
Free will or free (pillow?) shams
In the global shantytown?

“This is the kool logic
Of late capitalism.”

NBFTA, Mercosur, Hamas!
DVDs and open mikes!
Watercross and motocross!
SUVs and mountain bikes!

Trailer parks! Gated communities!
High-rise ghettos and favelas!
Acquired diplomatic immunities!
Self-help prophets! Braille novelas!

Mexico, Miami, Rio!
Euro-Disney, Bollywood!
Dell, Intel, Taco Bell, Geo!
Stanford post-docs in da hood!

I'll stop fronting pedagogical . . .
One last question (extra credit):
This kool logic ain't too logical
But it's still “kool.” Do you get it?!

“This is the kool logic
Of late capitalism.”

Barrio Speedwagon Blues

I
There's melting pots sofriendo
Masitas de muchedumbre
Y tengo la mala costumbre
Del que sonrie sufriendo;
So I stare outside my window
At the rats who pay their dues
Down abandoned avenues;
Varios diarios relicarios
De vecindarios precarios . . .
Barrio Speedwagon Blues!

II
I don't mind the daily walk,
De nuevo nursing the nightmare,
I'm happy just going nowhere,
Fast-track dreams in laugh-track shock,
I wear the street's scar, just like Prufrock.
In the crater of my shoes,
In the sunset's purple bruise,
Under streetlamps sin que alumbrar
Mi cómica pesadumbre . . .
Barrio Speedwagon Blues!
III
I've learned all my civics lessons
In this republic of deadpan,
Emptied out my mental bedpan
With Zen and antidepressants;
Now I'm stuck in convalescence
Y se me quiebra la cruz,
Y me acuerdo when we'd cruise
Down the coast, nursing home injuries,
Singing our song of lost centuries:
Barrio Speedwagon Blues!

IV
I'm too old to take a ride
In a rented chrome machine
Down the freeways and ravines
Hurling my pain to the tides;
Now my autism collides
With the headlines on the news
And my lovers say I snooze
En depresión atmosférica,
But I still dream of America . . .
Barrio Speedwagon Blues!

V
Esta ciudad es un empate
Entre alcaldes bilionarios
Y activistas solidarios
Atop a corporate mattress;
But I'd never knock the Rat Race
'Cause my blood cannot refuse
Its internal revenues
De burgues y de aterrante
Y el que la sepa que cante:
Barrio Speedwagon Blues!

VI
Esta canción no se acaba;
Gimme a sec and I'll finish it,
I'll spew out some funny shit,
Metaliterary baba;
So drop your joint and your java,
Stop scribbling those curlicues
Parce que maintenant j'accuse . . .!
Slumming days away like Dreyfus:
Why does all this feel so lifeless?
Barrio Speedwagon Blues!

Death and Taxes
The housewives laugh at what they can't avoid:
In single file, buckling one by one
Under the weight of the late summer sun,
They drop their bags, they twitch and are destroyed.
He hears a voice (there is a bust of Freud
Carved on the mountainside). He tucks the gun
Under his rented beard and starts to run.
("The housewives laugh at what they can't avoid.")
Like she-bears fettered to a rusted moon
They crawl across the parking lot and shed
Tearblood. The office park is closing soon.
Night falls. The neighborhood buries its dead
And changes channels—Zap! Ah, the purity
Of death and taxes and Social Security.
Cave Painter Blues

Before there was a self there was a cyborg
Cave painter, a hand whose dimly lit marquee
Of bloody parchments served the purpose of TV:
Advertising life-on-Earth, in morgue

Light. Squinting, he distilled the everlasting
Impression of leaf-blown river rapid roar
(And the blunt rock, what was it there for?):
The prehistory channel was broadcasting

His signal-tower graffiti, the timeless chronicle
Of the disgruntled marshland frog, the dodo’s chant,
The brooding bear, and the hypnotic ant,
The memory, the wound, the smudge, the mineral.

Today he cleans his brush and hides for time
Selling T-shirts outside the Guggenheim.