**For Ana Veldford**

by Lourdes Casal

Never a summertime in Provincetown[[1]](#footnote-1)

and even on this limpid[[2]](#footnote-2) afternoon

(so out of the ordinary for New York)

it is from the window of a bus that I contemplate

the serenity of the grass up and down Riverside Park[[3]](#footnote-3)

and the easy freedom of vacationers resting on rumpled blankets,

fooling around on bicycles along the paths.

I remain as foreign behind this protective glass

as I was that winter

—that unexpected weekend—

when I first confronted Vermont’s snow.

And still New York is my home.

I am ferociously loyal to this acquired *patria chica.*[[4]](#footnote-4)

Because of New York I am a foreigner anywhere else,

fierce pride in the scents that assault us along any West side street,

marijuana and the smell of beer

and the odor of dog urine

and the savage vitality of Santana[[5]](#footnote-5)

descending upon us

from a speaker that thunders, improbably balanced on a fire escape,

the raucous glory of New York in summer,

Central Park and us,

the poor,

who have inherited the lake of the north side,

and Harlem sails through the slackness of this sluggish afternoon.

The bus slips lazily,

down, along Fifth Avenue;

and facing me, the young bearded man

carrying a heap of books from the Public Library,

and it seems as if you could touch summer in the sweaty brow of the cyclist

who rides holding onto my window.

But New York wasn’t the city of my childhood,

It was not here that I acquired my first convictions,

not here the spot where I took my first fall,

nor the piercing whistle that marked the night.

This is why I will always remain on the margins,

a stranger among the stones,

even when I return to the city of my childhood

I carry this marginality, immune to all turning back,

too *habanera* to be *newyorkina[[6]](#footnote-6),*

too *newyorkina* to be

—even to become again—

anything else.

1. A beach community on Cape Cod. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. completely clear [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. On the Upper West Side of Manhattan. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. hometown [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A Latin-jazz-influenced rock band led by Mexican-born American guitarist Carlos Santana. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *habanera*: from Havana; *newyorkina*: from New York City [↑](#footnote-ref-6)