Virgil Suárez

The Charm of Repeating Islands

AFTER ANTONIO BENITEZ ROJO

My oldest daughter Alex brings me a map of the island of Cuba she’s found in her book. I am shaving and in the mirror in front of me and the mirror behind me, this island of my childhood repeats itself as many times as my eyes can look, and I think of the countless times a man, shaving, looks at a map of his country multiply in the mirror, his daughter’s puzzled look verging on annoyance. I say, “Look how it goes, sweetie.” She doesn’t know what I’m talking about, this endless repetition of exiles, caught in the endless act of shaving, wiping the slate clean, cutting themselves all this blood shed in the traveling from one place to another. Sure, it is a simple act, this act of repetition, but clearly it shows us the way. There, on this mirror, that one, the island rises from the depths of ocean, dresses itself in its most luscious green, it beckons us to return, the living and the dead, and suddenly you can image what the Tainos saw, what Arawaks saw, what Siboneys saw, what Columbus himself must have seen, an island in the distance, its lure, a trace of green-blue tinge blurring in the horizon, a father, a daughter, on the verge of getting home.