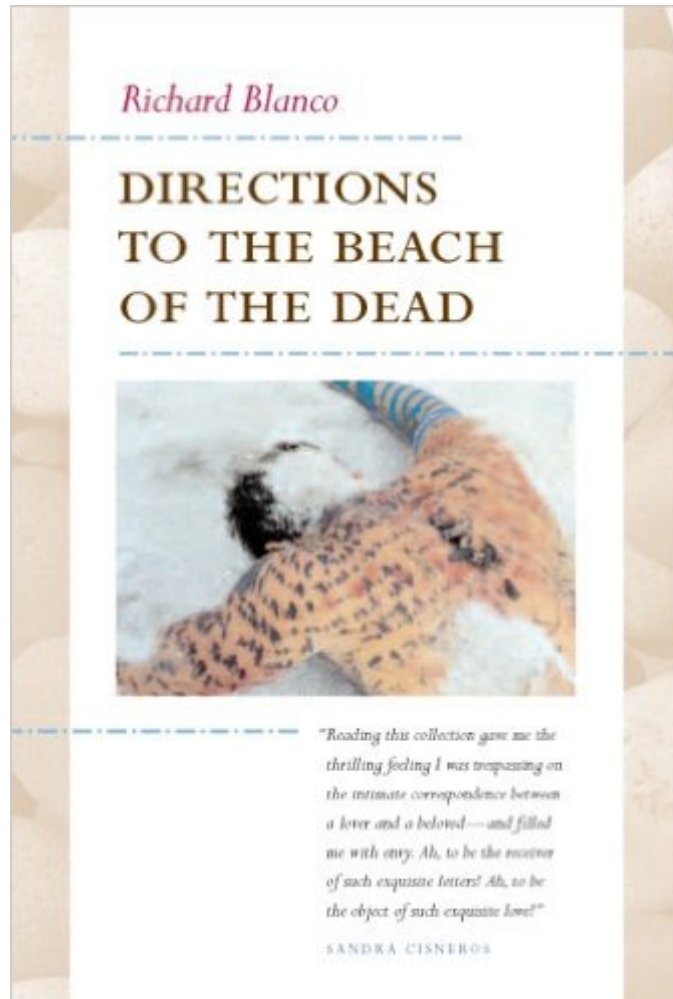


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Directions To The Beach Of The Dead (Camino Del Sol)



Synopsis

In his second book of narrative, lyric poetry, Richard Blanco explores the familiar, unsettling journey for home and connections, those anxious musings about other lives: "Should I live here? Could I live here?" Whether the exotic ("I'm struck with Maltese fever" | I dream of buying a little Maltese farm |) or merely different ("Today, home is a cottage with morning in the yawn of an open window"), he examines the restlessness that threatens from merely staying put, the fear of too many places and too little time. The words are redolent with his Cuban heritage: Marina making mole sauce; TÃ- a Ida bitter over the revolution, missing the sisters who fled to Miami; his father, especially, "his hair once as black as the black of his oxfords". Yet this is a volume for all who have longed for enveloping arms and words, and for that sanctuary called home. "So much of my life spent like this-suspended, moving toward unknown places and names or returning to those I know, corresponding with the paradox of crossing, being nowhere yet here." Blanco embraces juxtaposition. There is the Cuban Blanco, the American Richard, the engineer by day, the poet by heart, the rhythms of Spanish, the percussion of English, the first-world professional, the immigrant, the gay man, the straight world. There is the ennui behind the question: why cannot I not just live where I live? Too, there is the precious, fleeting relief when he can write "I am, for a moment, not afraid of being no more than what I hear and see, no more than this..." It is what we all hope for, too.

Book Information

Series: Camino del Sol

Paperback: 96 pages

Publisher: University of Arizona Press (September 1, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0816524793

ISBN-13: 978-0816524792

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.4 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (11 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #467,126 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #15 in [Books > Gay & Lesbian > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Gay](#) #42 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Regional & Cultural > United States > Hispanic American](#) #595 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Ancient, Classical & Medieval](#)

Customer Reviews

Richard Blanco's *Directions to the Beach of the Dead* carries a moving recommendation on its cover from Sandra Cisneros, who writes of "feeling" that she "was trespassing on the intimate correspondence between a lover and a beloved." She also describes her desire "to be the receiver of such exquisite letters." Blanco's poetry inspires "intimate" and "personal" reactions. Students, who have studied his first book, *City of a Hundred Fires* (1997), speak to its "beauty" and "courage" and one student writes of a "personal engagement" with "people and places I've never met and never known." It is tempting then, as Sandra Cisneros does, to imagine ourselves "listening in" while Blanco engages his intimate other, but it is equally tempting to see ourselves as the receiver or even the sender of these letters. We find ourselves as active players within his poetry, imaginatively engaging the characters and places. In this sense then, Blanco's poetry is about engagement but also about absence; he creates a vulnerability in his writings within the strength and vitality of a language that is animate and alive. Blanco's work presents a curious paradox then: It possesses both a vulnerability and a strength, simultaneously open and exposed to emotional need and offering access to a force capable of coming to terms with such longing. The volume's opening section offers glimpses into Blanco's travels in Rome, Venice, Barcelona, France, and Guatemala and Brazil. The collection's title poem instructs the reader on how to reach the "Beach of the Dead": "Go to Europe, go to Spain, in Barcelona, walk/under centuries hanging from the iron lamps" (ll 1-2). The poet then offers more personal suggestions for the journey: "Pull out your map, follow/the town's names lettered straight out to into the sea/ . . .

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