

Bread Upon the Waters

At a bus-stop, in the Algiers district,
across the river from the Cabildo,
holy orders and Napoleon's deathmask,
nine o'clock in the dusty morning
and already the streets are sweltering,
two little girls, twins, perhaps, clad
in matching frocks and beaded hair,
sit whimpering beside an older woman,
a woman old enough to be their grand-
mother, but who is, perhaps, their
mother, and who looks away toward
the horizon, the end of this world.
An old man in a long coat passes by,
and as he passes, he slips to each of
the girls a candy out of his deep pocket,
and—bread upon the waters—they
are calmed. Their mother has missed
this little miracle, and when she turns
toward her girls, wondering, the old
man is gone, has stepped onto a bus.
I alone saw, but I'm not talking,
because I also saw how the old man
had long prepared himself for this
moment, how he wished to pass by
like an angel, a poor man, a thief.