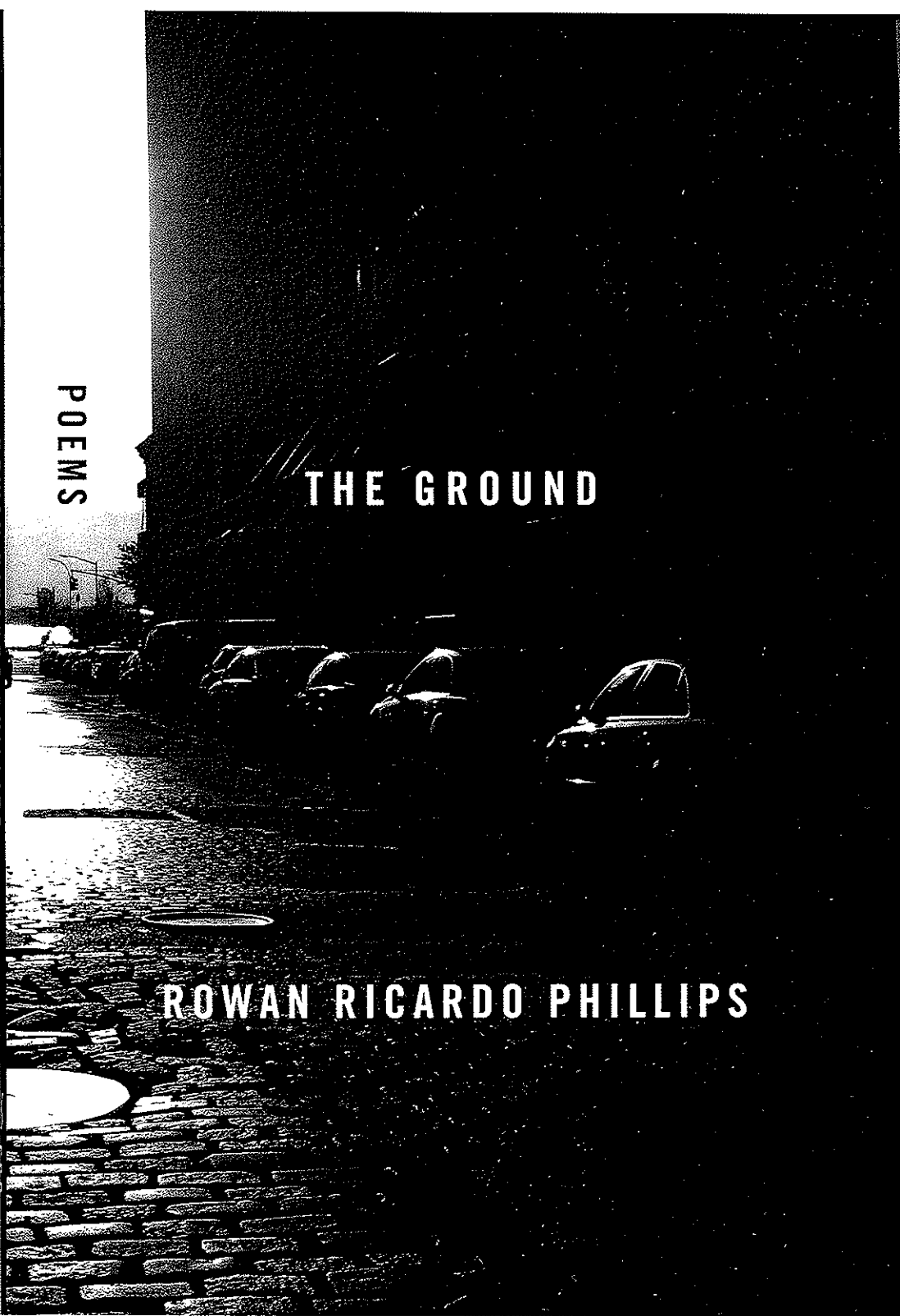


POEMS

THE GROUND

ROWAN RICARDO PHILLIPS



## TERRA INCOGNITA

I plugged my poem into a manhole cover  
That flamed into the first guitar,  
Jarred the asphalt and tar to ash,  
And made from where there once was  
Ground a sound instead to stand on.

## TABULA RASA

Tell me now, Poem, if you know: In the end when I'm gone,  
will you go, too?  
Are you your possible answer? Would you tell me the truth if  
you knew?  
Do you have something for me? Is everything a maybe with  
you? Does  
Maybe not matter when maybe's a landscape of untethered  
starlight?  
Is maybe is? Do you need to repeat how, explain why,  
Explain how and why you repeat? Are you what's gold in the  
mind's gray-green  
Weather? The verdigris of hexameters trailing dawn copters?  
Scarce sounds scissoring through darkness? Or simply the  
darkness itself?

**PROPER NAMES IN THE  
LYRICS OF TROUBADOURS**

My parents never call me Rowan.  
I'm Ricky, from Ricardo.  
But not Ricky Ricardo.

I'm also the first Phillips in my family.  
My mother decided Phillip, my father's  
Family name, sounded too much like a first name

(In America, at least).  
Rowan Phillip would lead inevitably  
To Phillip Rowan. That was her story, and she's sticking to it.

For the record, that's an Old Norse first name,  
A Spanish middle name,  
And one of those faux-English-faux-Dutch-sounding last names

That's really Greek for lover of horses.  
"Rowan Ricardo Phillips":  
Another of those names that straddles seas in the sails of unseen

Ships. Still, it sounds typically West Indian to me.  
And like "the West Indies" indefinite.  
An indefinite noun in an indefinite poem.

It took me a while to accept it.

## AUBADE, VOL. 2:

### THE UNDERGROUND SESSIONS

The sun is a sequence of flash and din  
In the sunken club's slanted black ceilings.  
And where once the crowds were mere pent peacocks,  
Twiddling half chatoyances, shimmers in the dark,  
Now only the dancers remain.  
The DJ rubs the mood of the room as though it  
Were his womb. We dance: we ripple in place.  
The twin black lakes of vinyl blend  
Stirred to life by the dipped needle.

No one I know knows the real ends of when. (What?)  
No one I know knows the real end of when. (What?)  
No one I know knows for real when to end. Again.

No one I know knows for real when to end. (What?)  
No one I know knows the real end of when. (What?)  
No one I know knows the real ends of when.

And when we thought we'd reached the end  
It was remixed again.  
No one I know knows for real when to end.

As when a drinking collared deer  
Hears a noise and  
Although safe by being Caesar's  
Feels a strange freedom there in that second,  
Some sense in the gut, a thunder of ribs,  
A surge in the blood, some cinched memory  
Of not being Caesar's,

I change in the sameness of change.  
I embrace the night and get gone.

## SHEEP MEADOW

The same motion used  
To make angels in the snow,  
When standing  
Is a signal of distress:  
A frantic wave of the shipwrecked  
To a distant, passing savior.

This angel in the snow.  
This bent note blended into  
The song of the snow.  
The winter wind blowing  
With the downbeat of the snow.

I fell backwards into it  
And began that awkward grace,  
But the ground wouldn't open.  
I had to dig my way in.

And on my back I can see sharpen  
The livid arch of the sky,  
Hear it laugh at  
The elusive horizon

Of the curving world;  
Its ancient anchor slowly lifting  
The ground adrift and absorbed.

*En el blanco infinito*  
*¡Qué pura y larga herida*  
*Dejó su fantasía!*

Lorca whispered to me  
From a ditch  
He can't climb out of,  
As though I were born  
In the calamitous balm of his mind.  
But I was born in the bare choir  
Of my own cold calor,  
Where the snow silences the traffic  
And the traffic silences the snow  
As though nothing's left to describe,  
No silence left to defile,  
The sky said not saying,  
The ground scrawling my name  
Like a body scrawls an angel into the snow  
Without the features of a face.

I get up from the ground  
And take a look at what I've left:

Three triangles converging at a circle,  
As if pointing to a head,  
A head no one will know was my head.  
The snow or the heat or someone's quick boot  
Will put an end to that.  
The snow, the forms,  
They come and go,  
Our parts in the world will come and go  
Like limbs fading in the snow  
While holding up a filling lake,  
Its simple, imperfect circle  
Orbiting the risen thought  
That sang up to the atrament  
Where the far-off instrument  
Of the god of poetry  
Waited to be played.

## CLOSING NIGHT'S NOCTURNE

At the end of an excellent career  
The moon combs her hair  
For one final time  
In the narrow half-lit window.

Tomorrow all her  
Memorized lines  
And muttered perfections,  
All of her heights will burn.

Nothing left but the lights  
That for so long framed the face,  
And then, too, slowly the lights  
To cinder.

Wait for the curtain to rise  
Again. "The hours," she said.  
"The hours I have now."  
Wait for the encore.

Wait for the human bow.