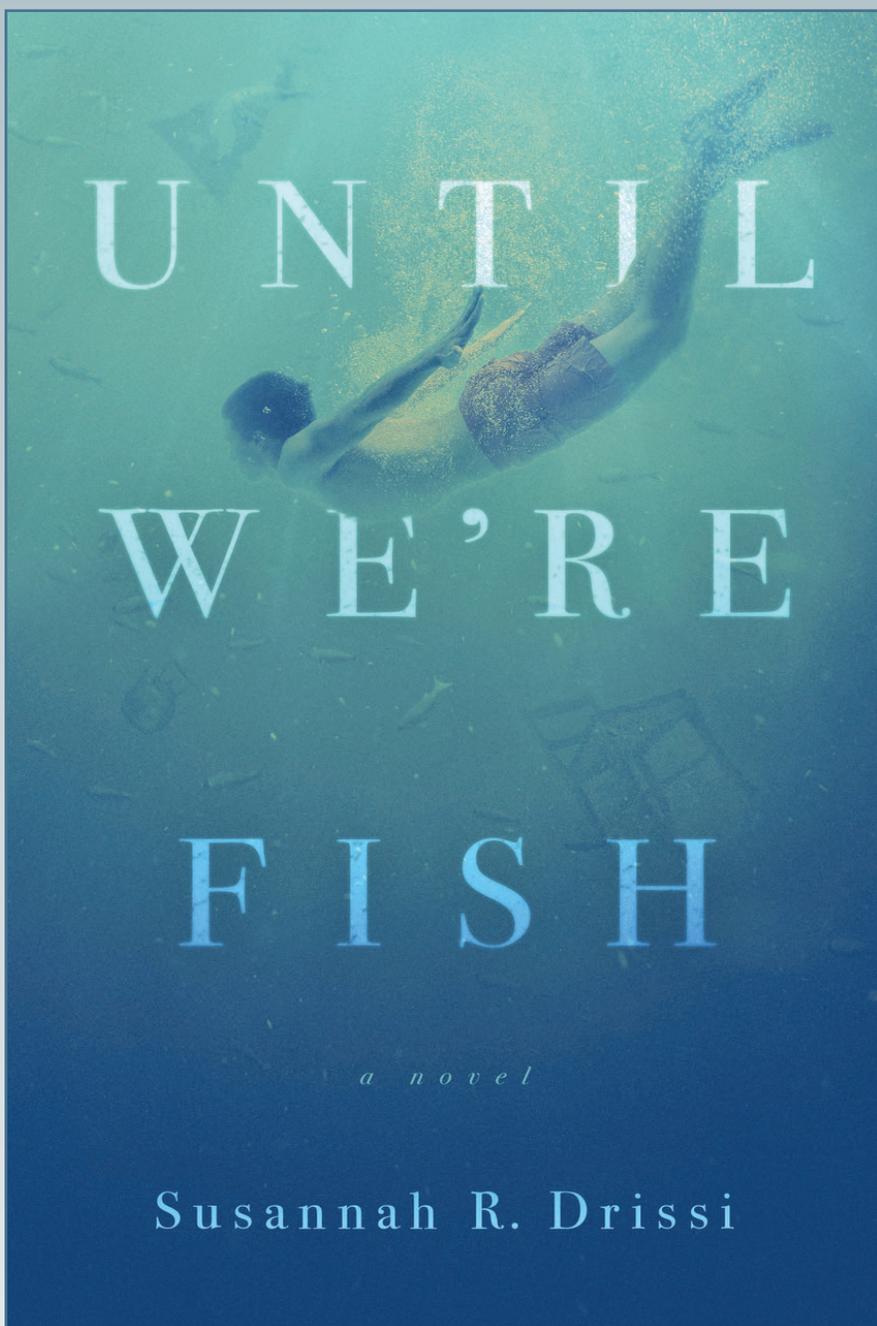


# UNTIL WE'RE FISH

by Susannah R. Drissi

*“Historically vibrant and sadly exquisite, *Until We’re Fish* renders a poetic and cinematic view of Cuba through the lens of loves—familial love, romantic love, patriotic love—and their complex intersections, all beautifully and uniquely told through this compelling story centered on lives that make history come alive.”*

—Richard Blanco, Presidential Inaugural Poet, author of *How to Love a Country*



This debut novel by Susannah Rodriguez Drissi is an unforgettable coming-of-age story, blending the romance, violence, mood, and ethos of the Cuban Revolution with a young man’s hopeless and heroic first love. Offering rare, vivid and honest portrayals of life in Cuba from 1959-1995, this novel delivers the truth of experience and the lyricism of poetry. Rodríguez Drissi constructs a Don Quixote for our times, an intimate exploration into the souls of people willing to sacrifice everything to be free.

*“I started from an island: Cuba. I can’t ignore it or cut it out of myself. It’s my point of departure and, sometimes, also my point of arrival. . . Trauma can be a creative state of mind, and I happen to have lived through moments that have gotten a rise out of me in some way. I’ve needed to unpack those moments, examine them, ask them questions—and the way that I’m most familiar with, most comfortable with, is by writing.”*

—**Susannah Rodriguez Drissi**

In *Until We’re Fish*, Rodríguez Drissi investigates the complicity between Cuba’s Americana and the 1959 Cuban Revolution to reckon with the emotional,

psychological, and historical forces that drive Cubans away from their island. To shape her novel the author reached deep into her real family’s feelings of love and bitterness for what they left behind in Cuba. Stunning and elegiac, *Until We’re Fish* juxtaposes powerful images of landscapes, playful meditations on life, and penetrating insights into the human heart to richly bring to life the story of mischievous dreamer Elio, a Cuban teen whose unbridled confidence is severely tested after a near-fatal shark attack. Elio longs for freedom from the dreary home he shares with his mother. He spends his days and nights fantasizing about an American bike and Maria, his vivacious next-door neighbor. Two obstacles stand in his way: the 1959 Cuban Revolution and Maria’s dream of moving to Chicago. Yet Elio is steadfast in believing that somehow, some way he will get both the girl and the Schwinn. When an injury leaves him terrified of the sea, he’s faced with an impossible choice: to overcome his fear and do whatever it takes to realize his vision, or to stay safe and risk losing everything he’s been living for.

## About the author

Susannah Rodríguez Drissi, PhD is an award-winning Cuban-born poet, writer, playwright, translator, director, producer, and scholar. She is Faculty in Writing Programs at UCLA, Affiliate Scholar in UC-Cuba Program Initiative, and Associate Literary Editor for Cuba Counterpoints, Cuban and Caribbean Research Studies Institute. As a 1.5-generation writer (born in Cuba in the 1970s, but coming of age in the US), Rodríguez Drissi writes about Cuba through a double lens—from the vantage point of the native and also from the benefit of a temporal and geographical distance. Her poems, short stories, creative nonfiction, and reviews have appeared in anthologies such as *In Season—Stories of Discovery, Loss, Home, and Places in Between* (2018 Florida Book Award Winner); and journals such as the Los Angeles Review of Books, Saw Palm, Literal Magazine, Diario de Cuba (Madrid), SX Salon, Raising Mothers, Acentos Review, Cuba Counterpoints, among other journals. Following readings at the University of California, Irvine and the University of California, Los Angeles, her award-winning play, *Houses Without Walls*, premiered at the Hollywood Fringe Festival in 2018. More recently, her short plays, *The Fruit Flies* and *Rey y Atenea* were selected to the 2019 Short+Sweet Theatre Festival and premiered at the Lee Strasberg Film & Theatre Institute, in Los Angeles. *Rey y Atenea* received an Audience Choice Award and was Finalist for the 2019 NBC Universal Talent Infusion Programs Award. She is the author of the poetry collection *The Latin Poet's Guide to the Cosmos* (Floricanto Press, 2019) and *Rey y Atenea / Rey and Atenea, a Bilingual Edition* (Cassandra Press, 2019). Her musical, *Radio Nocturno, El Musical*, was scheduled to premiere at Miami Dade College's Koubek Center, on August 6th, 2020, directed by Victoria Collado (John Leguizamo's Latin History for Morons), musical direction by Jesse Sanchez (Hamilton, national tour), and produced by George Cabrera (Broadway Factor). The production was postponed due to COVID-19 and is now planned for August 2021.



Learn more at [susannahrodriguezdrissi.com](http://susannahrodriguezdrissi.com)

## Ask Susannah

- » As a 1.5-generation writer (born in Cuba in the '70s, but coming of age in the US), you write about Cuba through a double lens—that is, from the vantage point of the native and also from the benefit of geographical distance. Is that rare for a writer writing in English today?
- » You have said that you can't ignore Cuba or cut it out of yourself, that it's your point of departure and, sometimes, your point of arrival. Tell us what that means?
- » Your novel starts in 1959 at the beginning of the Cuban Revolution. What were the circumstances surrounding the Revolution? For those who don't know, give us a brief background of the time.
- » You've said, "Trauma can be a creative state of mind." How might today's COVID-19 and racial trauma affect your future work and the way your readers come to understand your story?
- » Do you tell stories differently when they're in Spanish versus English and vice versa? How about poetry versus playwriting?
- » Does the Revolution in Cuba have any similarities with what's happening in our world today? What is it like in Cuba today?
- » Cultural appropriation in fiction writing is a controversial, contentious topic in the literary world, with "American Dirt" being the most recent example. What are your thoughts?
- » Many artists take tremendous risks and sacrifice other parts of their lives to pursue their dreams. What risks, if any, did you take in pursuit of your writing life?

### Until We're Fish

By Susannah R. Drissi

Propertius Press (October 6, 2020) ISBN: 978-1-67810 739-0  
Trade Paper

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